

# THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1078.—VOL. XLII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 29, 1883.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["PAUL LECLERCQ!" SHE CRIED OUT, "AT LAST—AT LAST I HAVE FOUND YOU!"]

## MARAQUITA.

### CHAPTER VII.

THE stable clock was striking ten, as Maraquita, having, with great difficulty, contrived to escape from the drawing-room on the plea of a bad headache, stole quietly through a little side-door, and reached the gate at the end of the plantation, where her father had appointed to meet her. She had wrapped herself in a large fur-lined cloak, and drawn the hood over her head so as to form a complete disguise if any one saw her; but for all that her heart was beating with nervous violence as she glanced hurriedly round to make sure she was unobserved, and she trembled like a wind-shaken leaf, when Paul Chevasse stepped from behind some bushes, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"So, my truant bird, I find you at last," he said in his low, soft tones. "You thought, when you left Paris, that you said good-bye to me for ever, I suppose, but you were out in

your calculations, *ma chère*—I shall not let you go so easily."

"How did you discover where I was?" she asked, almost below her breath, and her heart sinking with the old, well-remembered feeling of hopelessness at the sound of his voice.

"That I will tell you on some future occasion; at present I have more important things to speak of. But," he added, glancing round, "is there no place near here—no arbour, or garden pavilion, where we can talk with less risk of being overheard?"

She considered a moment, then led the way to a little summer-house on the other side of the shrubbery; it had a door, and when this was shut they were pretty secure from intrusion.

"At all events, this is better than being outside," remarked Chevasse, striking a fusee, and with it lighting a lantern, that he held above his head. "Your spirits don't seem to be raised by the fact of my proximity," he added, with a disagreeable smile, as he surveyed his daughter's features, which were quite

colourless. You look the very reverse of pleased."

"Then my looks speak truth," she answered, candidly. "If I could have reconciled it to my conscience to have remained with you in Paris I should have done so; but I had only a choice of two evils, and I chose the one I thought the lesser."

"And since your arrival in England you have been *innocently* happy, I suppose?" he said, with a sneer he could not restrain.

She did not reply, but a light leapt up to her eyes, that answered as well as words.

"That makes it all the greater pity that you should have to leave," he went on, remorselessly; "I am returning to the Continent to-morrow, and I intend taking you with me."

She turned upon him with one of her old swift, rebellious movements.

"But I will not go!" she exclaimed, passionately. "If the life I led with you was bad then, it would be ten thousand times less endurable now, and nothing shall induce me to return to it!"

"You speak too strongly, *ma belle*—recollect I am your father, and the law will enforce any

command I may think fit to lay upon you. I don't wish to be harsh; indeed, I find kind measures always answer best, and it's your own fault if you make me use others, but I insist most strongly on having you with me until you are twenty-one."

"Papa! You don't know all. I have something to tell you that has changed the whole current of my life," she said, clasping his arm with her little nervous fingers, while a lovely blush crept over her face from throat to brow. "Sir Piers Lyngard has asked me to be his wife!" She waited a minute for him to speak, but finding he made no attempt to do so, lifted her eyes, and saw on his face a look that brought vividly back to her memory the expression it had worn last Christmas Eve, when he had caught sight of the baronet standing in the light of the Paris lamps. Some dim foreboding of evil—a presentiment, that she could not have explained, struck a cold chill to her heart, and she said, quickly,—

"Do you know Sir Piers?"

"Yes."

"Then"—with a little catching of the breath—"you must also know how fortunate I am to have won his love. Are you not—glad?"

"I am sorry—very sorry, for your own sake."

"But why should you be? I am aware"—clasping her hands together, and speaking rapidly—"of the difference of position between us, and how it will be said he is making a mistake."

"That is a very small thing in the present instance," Paul Cherease said, interrupting her without ceremony. "Listen, Marquita. This afternoon I was just inside the wood, and hidden behind the trunk of a tree while Sir Piers was speaking to you, and so I heard all that passed; and although perhaps we have not been exactly a model father and daughter, you and I—though we differ on most points, and have, in effect, very few sympathies in common—I felt heartily sorry when I found you engaged for him."

"Sorry!" she repeated, wonderingly, "Love is hardly a thing to be sorry for."

"In this case it is, for—understand me well—you are the one person out of all the world Sir Lyngard cannot marry!"

There was something in his tone that carried with it a sense of conviction. All its old softness was gone, and in its place was an earnestness that, whatever it may have sprung from, at least seemed genuine.

"You speak in enigmas!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Explain what you mean."

"I would rather not explain if I can help it. Won't you take my word, and give him up without seeking to know the reason that prevents the possibility of your becoming his wife?"

"Never!" she cried, vehemently. "Nothing can—nothing shall part us!"

He looked at her for a moment in silence, and probably read aright the determination her face expressed. No, she would not give him up!

"Then," he said at length, "you force me to a decision I had hoped to have kept from you. You heard the story Sir Piers told of his brother—garbled and one-sided of course, but showing you pretty accurately the sort of feeling he entertained toward Lepers the man he called Horace Lyngard's murderer. Well, I am that man!"

Just at first the words seemed to fall on her ears without conveying any meaning to her brain; then she staggered back, and supported herself against the wall, looking at him with widely dilated eyes, and a face that horror had blanched to a dead whiteness.

"It is not true—it cannot be true!" she exclaimed at last, in a queer, half-stifled voice. "Horace would surely not be so cruel as to permit!"

"Don't speak so loudly—someone may overhear you," he said nervously, glancing round, "and the very last thing I should desire would be for Sir Piers to see me. Naturally enough you are inclined to take his view of

the affair, and there is not time now for me to exculpate myself, otherwise I might plead a justification. However, you see I spoke truly when I told you the impossibility of such a tie as husband and wife existing between you."

"Hush!" she exclaimed, in a low hoarse whisper, and putting her hand to her brow, "Don't speak just yet. I want to think—to realise what this means. At present it seems like an awful, awful dream."

Cold-hearted, utterly selfish man of the world as he was, he could not help being touched by the white agony in her face—an agony all the more terrible to witness because of the dazed sort of bewilderment that accompanied it. The effect of a blow like this, totally unexpected and unprepared for, is at first an almost utter suspension of the faculties. Marquita knew that she was living, breathing, that her father stood opposite, and that he had just told her something which had struck her more sorely than if he had plunged a sharp knife in her bosom, but the rest seemed a strange misty labyrinth, to which she held no clue. Then, after a bit, and little by little, the mist cleared away, and the truth in all its horror burst upon her—she was the daughter of Horace Lyngard's murderer, and therefore could never be his brother's wife!

A low cry, like that of an animal wounded to death, came from her white lips, and, uttering it, she sank down on her knees on the ground, and hid her face in her clasped hands. When she raised it, her father absolutely started at its haggard wildness.

"You have not accused me for any purpose of your own—can you speak the truth?" she said, fixing her eyes upon him with pleading intensity.

"Unfortunately—yes. Is it likely I should accuse myself of such a thing if it were not true? The law cannot touch me now for the part I took in the deed, but the years that have elapsed since have not dulled the edge of Sir Piers Lyngard's hatred, as his language of this afternoon was sufficient to show you. He said he swore over his brother's dead body that he would be revenged—and he has kept his word, for since then he has made my life a torment to me—on account!"

There was no doubting the man's sincerity—the dark look of impatient passion that came in his eyes at the mention of the baronet's name was quite sufficient to attest his hate. And then—just as it seemed for the sake of his listener, that because the knowledge once unloosed the great unbrokenness of many years, forced its way through—he went on to tell her, after the deed, he had been hiding at Hambury, and had heard of Sir Piers' arrival, and determined to avenge Horace's death; then how he had resolved to go to Australia, whither after a time, his enemy had followed.

"I am no coward," he said, speaking as if to himself. "If I had been face to face with him I should not have feared him; but it was the sense of pursuit—the feeling that, however safe I might deem myself, he was yet on my track, that made my existence one continual burden. Often and often I resolved to meet him, and shoot him dead as I had shot his brother, and then something held me back. I felt a presentiment that if I once let him get near me I was a doomed man. And so years passed on, and then I learned that it was reported I had died at Vienna; and trusting to my changed appearance, and having adopted another name, I returned to Europe; for I was tired of my bush life, which was one I was eminently unqualified for. I settled in Paris, brought my gun from the Gironde, and contrived to make money; but on Christmas Eve I saw him, and then all my sense of security vanished. It was imperative that I should find out whether he was staying in Paris, and therefore I followed him, with the result of discovering he was on his way to the railway station, from whence he took a ticket to London. So now," he continued, breaking off abruptly, "you see the impossibility of your remaining at Lepers Court."

Marquita was silent for a little time longer

—even yet she could scarcely realize that the beautiful dream was over—that she must go away from Sir Piers and never see him again because between them lay a gulf that could not be spanned—that not even love might bridge across!

She turned to her father with a dull look of stony despair in her eyes.

"Tell me what to do," she said, "I am incapable of thinking for myself. I only knew I must leave at once—to-night, because it would kill me to see him again."

"I have thought of that," he answered, averting his eyes, "and so have made arrangements for taking you away. But you must leave a note forbidding it, or he will probably follow you—and I suppose you don't wish him to know the truth?"

"With him to know!" she repeated, "I would rather die than he should discover it!"

"Very well. Then write and tell him you have made a mistake regarding the feelings you fancied you entertained towards him—that you do not care for him, and therefore you have left the Court."

"But how could I write anything so utterly false?"

"It is the only way in which you can make him understand you have really given him up, and, believe me, the means are justified by the end. You tell him a falsehood to prevent his making a discovery that would pain him as much as it pains you—it is for his sake," Cherease said, emphatically.

She had been right in feeling that she was incapable of thinking for herself—her brain was numb and powerless under the strain it had undergone; and so, without further argument, she wrote in pencil on a leaf torn from his pocket-book the words he had dictated—hardly comprehending their real meaning.

"Now," said Cherease, as she finished, "you had better go back to the Court, and the note where Sir Piers is likely to find it, being a bag containing what things you require, and at half past twelve slip out again, and meet me in the road a little beyond the Lodge gates. Meanwhile, I'll go and get a horse and cart from the village to take us to the station, and this time to-morrow we shall be across the Channel."

## CHAPTER VIII.

Sir Piers Lyngard was rather inclined to think late past his best that evening, when, almost directly after they got in the drawing-room, his aunt took possession of him, and challenged him to a game of chess. He had been looking forward to a delicious *fin-d'été* with Marquita while Lady Lyngard enjoyed her customary dose, and he could only ascribe it to the general contrariness of human nature that on this particular evening she should be so wide awake as to dispense with any necessity for closing her eyes at all. However, there was nothing for it but compliance, so he sat down and began arranging the ivory men, inwardly resolving the game should not be a long one, but before it was half over Marquita—who he had noticed was rather pale and quiet—rose, saying she had a headache, and excused herself on the plea of wishing to go to bed.

This was a second disappointment, and even harder to be borne than the previous one, so the baronet may be pardoned for not paying quite so much attention as he should have done to the game, which Lady Lyngard won easily enough.

After she had retired, he went outside on the terrace to smoke his cigar, and ponder over the events of a day that had had such an important influence over his life, and which was, as he hoped, the beginning of a new era, in which he might escape the sorrows of the past would be forgotten. Naturally enough his thoughts centred themselves on Marquita. He was thinking how unconsciously he had grown to love her, and how entirely she had come to permeate his life ever since that first morning when he had seen her standing in the dark



frame of the doorway, with the sunlight falling about her like a glory, and a basket of flowers in her hand.

Hitherto his experience of women had not been altogether a happy one, and had certainly not given him very exalted ideas of their qualities, either mental or moral; but now, he told himself, he had found one who was the ideal of his fancy, who was pure, true and beautiful, and who—best of all—loved him!

And so, after all his wanderings, he would settle down, and live the peaceful life of a country gentleman, with his wife to help him in all his plans for improving his estate and the condition of his tenantry, and children growing up about him, to perpetuate the name of which, years ago, he had been so proud. It was a pleasant vision, and no doubt of the possibility of its fulfilment was permitted to mar it.

Perhaps he was a little excited; at any rate, he felt no inclination for going in doors, so pleasantly he strolled idly down the grounds, still smoking, and wondering how his aunt would greet the news of his intended marriage—which he decided should take place very soon, for there existed no reason for its being postponed, beyond the necessity of a toupéau for Maraquita, and that could soon be procured.

"Hulloa!" he muttered, coming suddenly to a standstill, as he got within sight of the little summer-house where Maraquita had taken her father, and saw the faint glimmer of a light inside. "I wonder who is there."

Stepping softly, he approached quite close to the entrance, and drew back behind the bushes as he saw two figures issuing from the door—those of a man and woman. The former put his hand on his companion's shoulder, and leaned down to whisper something to her, after which he walked rapidly away, while she turned in the direction of the Court, and glided with equal swiftness through the shrubbery.

"One of the maids been to meet her lover, I suppose," he thought. "I wonder how she'll contrive to get in the house," thought Sir Piers to himself; and actuated by some impulse of curiosity he followed her to a little side door of the Court, which she proceeded to unlock and open. On the threshold she paused a moment and looked up at the sky, the movement causing the hood of her cloak to fall back from her face, which was thus revealed, and even in the semi-obscure Sir Piers immediately recognized it as Maraquita's.

He uttered an exclamation of surprise, and sprang forward, but not in time to arrest her, for without noticing him she closed the door, which she also locked on the inside, leaving him standing there in complete bewilderment. What could it mean, he asked himself? Who was this man she had met, and who had put his hand on her in a manner that was in itself a caress? She knew no one about here on any terms of intimacy, and Lady Lyngard had told him he was an orphan who had no relatives in England, so her companion could not have the claim of kinship; besides, if this had been so, he would have come to the house openly, and saved her the necessity of meeting him in so clandestine and compromising a manner. To say the least, the affair was mysterious, and the only construction to be placed upon it an unfavorable one.

How he wished he had caught a glimpse of the man's face when he was so near him, and when it would have been so easy to discover his identity!

He remained outside, pacing up and down the terrace in a fever of restlessness and excitement that all his endeavours were insufficient to control, even while he told himself he would reserve his judgment until he had seen Maraquita, and asked her to explain her conduct—which no doubt she would be able to do satisfactorily.

"Have I not faith in her?—can I not trust her?" he exclaimed aloud, throwing away his cigar, which had long since gone out, and stamping his foot angrily on the ground. "What is my love worth if it will not stand

such a test as this? I am sure she is pure, and faithful, and nothing save her own word would make me doubt it."

And then he went indoors, and sat down in his study, wishing the long hours of the night were over, and morning had come so that he might see and question her, and striving, with all his might, not to allow his belief in her to be shaken even by what he had just witnessed.

By-and-by he left the room for the purpose of getting a book from the library—going to bed was out of the question, although it was twelve o'clock, and the rest of the household, accustomed to Lady Lyngard's early habits, had long since retired. The lights being out he took a candle in his hand, and as he was crossing the hall fancied he distinguished the faint rustling of a woman's dress sweeping the floor. He stayed a moment to listen, but the sound was not repeated, and believing he must have been mistaken, he went on, and selecting a volume, returned to the study.

Evidently someone had entered it since he left, for on the table, and placed in a conspicuous position so as to catch his eye, was an envelope directed to him in a woman's handwriting. He tore it open, wondering greatly at the strangeness of the incident, and took out a small folded piece of paper, on which were traced a few lines in pencil, and these he proceeded to read.

Once—twice—three times, he read them over, his face blanching to a strange grey sort of pallor, and in his eyes the expression of a terrible despair. Then he tore the paper into a hundred fragments, and with a passionate gesture of loathing, flung them on the ground at his feet.

"False—false by her own confession, and I would have staked my life on her truth!" he cried out, from between his set teeth. "I suppose she was dazzled by the thought of the wealth and title I could offer her, and when this lover appeared she found even those would not compensate her for giving him up. Great Heavens! how she has fooled me!"

Just at first, even the idea of losing her was second to the pain and humiliation of discovering how completely she had deceived him—how all her tender words had been lies—her sweet looks the beguilements of a coquette who knew the power of her beauty, and triumphed in its exercise. He muttered a curse on his own blindness as he flung himself into a chair, and let his head fall on his folded arms, while he repeated over to himself the words of her note—words in which she told him it was impossible they could ever be anything to each other, or ever meet again.

"That means she intends leaving to-night—perhaps has left already!" he muttered, starting up, struck by a fresh idea, and then, without giving himself time for further reflection, he went to her room, and knocked at the door.

No one answered, so he turned the handle and looked in, with the result he had anticipated—it was empty. Probably, he decided, she had gone again to meet the man he had seen her with—most likely had been on her way when he had heard the sound of her dress in the hall, and had left the house while he was in the library.

Hardly having any definite purpose more than a wild desire to see her—to speak to her once more—perhaps to set eyes on the man for whom she had forsaken him, he snatched up his hat and rushed out into the misty shadows of the February night, which, however, was less dark now than it had been an hour or two ago. He went first of all to the summer-house, which was empty, and then, fancying he heard the sound of wheels, proceeded across the avenue and out of the Lodge gates. There he paused a moment, and looking round, became aware that a few dozen yards away a dog-cart was standing, with a man's figure in it, whose outlines were just visible in the light of one of the lamps. Then, out of the shadows of the wall emerged another figure, that of a woman, who sprang hastily in, just as Sir Piers started forward, calling her name.

"Maraquita!"

At the sound of his voice, she looked round quickly, as did also the man who was with her; then the latter took up his whip, and lashed the horse with a fierceness that made the animal start off at a gallop, and a few seconds later they had disappeared from sight, while Sir Piers stood listening to the lessening echoes of the wheels which bore from him the woman he had loved, "not wisely, but too well!"

## CHAPTER IX.

True, which recks neither of joy or sorrow, smiles or tears, which goes on its way unheeding whither it carries solace to the wretched, balm to the wounded, or that agony of "hope deferred which maketh the heart sick" to those who wait, had slipped by, bringing first of all the green promise of the spring-time, the blossoms of summer, and, finally, the golden harvest of autumn.

On a certain October afternoon, in a certain hospital on the outskirts of Paris, Maraquita was standing at the window, looking out as she had looked out last Christmas-Eve when she was first introduced to the reader, but changed in a great many respects since then. She was older, sadder, graver; and the expression on her features when in repose was one of settled melancholy that told its own story to the most careless observer, while her black dress, white cap and apron, with a red cross on the breast, announced her as an hospital nurse.

This was the vocation she had chosen, when, weary of life, looking forward to nothing but a long vista of despairing misery, she had accompanied her father to Paris, after saying good-bye to Lyngard Chase, and all the hopes that had centred round it.

At first she had been simply too apathetic to care what became of her, and was only conscious of a desire to escape through the portals of death to that land of rest and peace that lay beyond; but she was young, and strong, and healthy, and the dark angel passed her by, to lay his chill hand on those who drew back shivering, from his touch.

Naturally enough, after she knew of the blood staining his hands she had drawn back more than ever from her father, who, on his part, seemed far from anxious to force his presence upon her; and so, after a little while, and when the knowledge had come to her that there might still be something for her to do in the world—something which if it did not bring happiness to herself—would at least be of help to others.

She applied for and obtained a position as nurse at the hospital of Dr. Lormier—a physician who made a speciality of brain disease, and who had obtained a high reputation for skill in this particular branch of his profession.

The life was an arduous one, entailing, as it did constant attention, unflinching patience, and hard work, but it had the effect of taking her in a measure out of herself; and if it could not bring oblivion, it dulled the pain of remembrance. She did not forget. Sometimes, when there came a pause in their daily routine, and she had, as now, a few minutes' leisure, thoughts of the old times crowded themselves upon her, bringing with them a veritable heart-sickness of despair.

She might have been so happy! and now the future, instead of brightening with the promise youth such as hers had a right to expect, lay stretched out before her, a dreary waste of years, with no single ray of sunshine flecking the darkness of its shadow.

But this was not the worst. Even the parting with Sir Piers would have lost some of its bitterness if he could have known the impious fate which held them asunder, and have yet comforted himself with the knowledge that she still loved him—that her desertion had not been voluntary.

To-day, as she stood at the window, gazing out on a little patch of garden that looked brown and bare under the low October skies, and beyond which was a boundary of high

wall, she was recalling how, from behind the curtains, she used to watch him coming home from hunting, his red coat making a warm glint of colour against the sombre hues of the landscape, as he rode up the avenue between the rows of leafless trees; and then, like a flood there is no stemming, the anguish of her loss came suddenly upon her, and she sank on her knees to bury her face in her hands, and wonder, in a dull sort of way, how she could go on living—how she could bear the grey monotony of the coming years while her heart was torn with useless repining—while the great human longing for love was sending up its cry from her inmost soul!

Presently a footstep sounded in the passage outside, and she started up hastily, recalled to herself and the necessity for composure. If she had not learned submission to the inevitable, she had at least been taught self-control, and when the door opened and Dr. Lormier, a white-haired man of about sixty, entered, her face had regained its usual expression of placid tranquillity, and she was standing with her hands clasped before her, looking like some mediæval saint in her nun-like garb, and with the cross rising and falling at each pulsation of her heart.

"You are pale," observed the doctor, with whom, by reason of her gentle submission and quiet attention to her duties, she was an especial favourite.

"Am I? Not more than usual, I think," she answered, smiling faintly; "I am well enough."

"That is all right; I want you to keep so, for I have a patient I wish to put under your care," he said, taking her hand between his and patting it in the fatherly manner he had adopted towards her. "It is a lady who has been suffering from disease of the brain brought on from the effect of an external injury some fifteen years ago, but although it is of such long standing, I am hoping to cure it completely. She has been already treated by a doctor, who has tried a system of his own, in which he had great faith, but which has only partially succeeded; for though the patient is at times rational enough, she has frequent relapses, and her memory is not restored, so for this reason he has brought her to Paris, thinking my larger experience may have a more satisfactory result. I told him she could come here this afternoon, and I want you to undertake entire charge of the nursing—that is to say, if your strength has not been overtaken by what you have been doing lately," he added, looking with some anxiety at her careworn face.

"You can never give me too much work—the more I have the better I like it!" she exclaimed, restlessly; "it is only when I am occupied that I am—happy," she was going to say, but the word, when applied to her own case, seemed such a bitter mockery that she left it unuttered.

He looked at her rather sadly, and shook his head. He did not know what it was, but he guessed some great agony had touched her life, and knew that if the fires she had passed through had been cleansing ones, they had left scars which the after-years could never wholly obliterate.

A few hours later, when she had seen to the appointments of the room the new patient was to occupy, and busied herself arranging it, she was sent for to the salon, where she found Dr. Lormier in conversation with a younger and slighter man, whose back was towards her.

"Sister Maraquita, this is the gentleman who has brought our new patient from England," said the former; "he wishes to give you a few instructions himself as to her diet, &c. Let me introduce him—Dr. Lascelles."

The meeting, totally unexpected on either side, was naturally a surprise to both, and not without a tinge of embarrassment. Lascelles was, of course, aware there had been something mysterious in the way Maraquita left Lyngard Court, although true particulars of her flight had never transpired, for Sir

Piers thought it best to unfold certain details to his aunt, who, in order to avoid any chance of scandal, coined the first excuse that came to hand—namely, that her young companion had been summoned in haste from the Court, through the illness of a relative, on the Continent.

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure, Miss Leigh," said Lascelles, shaking hands with her, and wondering at the change that had transformed her from a beautiful girl to a sad-eyed woman; "I had no idea the nurse Dr. Lormier was speaking so highly of would prove to be an old acquaintance."

Maraquita did not answer—self-controlled as she was on ordinary occasions, she yet could not remain unmoved by the sight of one who brought the past so vividly before her. As it happened, Lascelles did not notice her silence, his attentions being taken up by Dr. Lormier, who, however, was directly afterwards sent for to some urgent case that required his immediate attention, and who, as he went out, said, "I will come back shortly; and meanwhile, Lascelles, you can explain to the sister what you wish her to do with regard to your protégée."

As soon as he had gone Maraquita sat down opposite Lascelles, with her back to the light, and began asking questions of her former home and friends.

"Sir Piers and Lady Lyngard went to London almost directly after you left," he said, not unmindful of the vibration in her voice as she spoke of them, and perhaps guessing its origin; "and there they have been ever since."

"And Aviole Foley?"

"She—" a flash rose to his pale face at the mention of her name—"also went to the metropolis with her mother, and was presented at the first drawing-room of the season, where, I believe, her *début* was a great success, and she was much admired. When I came away from home, a week ago, she had not returned, but she was expected at the Manor to spend Christmas, and—prepare for her wedding."

"Her wedding!" Maraquita repeated, with more animation than she had as yet displayed; "Whom, then, is she going to marry?"

"Have you not heard? It was announced in all the society journals."

"But I see none of them," she interposed, with a faint smile. "My work gives me so much to do that I have not the time, even if the opportunity were allowed me, of reading English newspapers. I hope, whoever her husband, Aviole will be happy."

"Yes," he said, slowly, and as if the words were spoken with an effort; "I hope so too, and I think—I think," he broke off abruptly, and looked out of the window, then added, biting his lip. "Everyone says Sir Piers Lyngard is a most suitable match for her."

Paler than she was it had seemed impossible for Maraquita to become, but the blood even left her lips at the announcement, and she sank back in her chair, gazing blankly up at the chill, grey skies, while her fingers locked themselves together with the close tenacity of a vice. Over and over again she had said to herself Sir Piers might—nay, probably would marry; but, for all that, the blow came upon her with no less force—was none the less hard to be borne. She knew quite well she had not a right to expect him to remain single for her sake, even if she had been able to tell him of the barrier between them, and that it was by no fault of her own she had broken her faith—no right, and yet the love that was in her cried out vehemently for its justification; for though the riches of India, the fame of the world, had been laid at her feet, they would have had no power in tempting her to be false to him!

Presently, and as if from afar off, Lascelles' voice came to her.

"I believe they are to be married the week after Christmas—the last day of the old year, but the wedding is to be an extremely quiet one; Sir Piers, it seems, does not care for any

display." And then he went on talking of the different arrangements, while she, in her agony, was longing to cry out and bid him be silent, until she realized what it meant.

Perhaps sorrow like hers, in its first sharpness, makes us oblivious of other people's feelings. She never noticed that Lascelles' face was well nigh as pallid as her own, and that he spoke with a strange, cold deliberation, as if conscious of his weakness, and yet determined not to spare himself its pain. The news had been a terrible shock to him as well; for although he had not seen Aviole since the day he told her of his love—although she had gone away to London with her mother, and never sent him a word of farewell—although he afterwards heard of her beauty and the triumphs it had won for her in society, he yet never doubted she cared for him, and that she would be true until he should be free to claim her. Of what she had seen and heard through the barred gates of the "Wilderness" he knew nothing; and so, when the rumour of her betrothal reached him, he said to himself, bitterly, that she was like the rest of her sex—false, fickle, changeable as the wind itself, and that the world had quickly taught her its lesson of the desirability of rank and riches—neither of which he was in a position to offer.

He made no complaint—as indeed he had not the right to—but it seemed to him that the one thing that had made it endurable had gone out of his life. Even his book failed to interest him now, for of what avail would fame be to him with no one to share it, or sympathize in the toil by which it was won?

Neither he nor Maraquita spoke for some little while—not, in fact, till the striking of the clock roused Lascelles from the reverie into which he had fallen, and at the same time recalled the purpose of his visit.

"Dr. Lormier has probably told you I am bringing a lady here to place under his care," he said, and she gave her attention by a great effort. "Her intellect has been unsettled for some years, and I have been hoping against hope to restore it. I am still hoping, in fact, that Dr. Lormier's skill may complete the cure I have only partially effected, and—from what he has said of you—I have great faith in your nursing."

"I will help you all I can," she said, rising, but still keeping her hand on the back of her chair, as though she needed support—then, as a sudden thought struck her, she added, "Was this the lady with you at the 'Wilderness?'"

He answered in the affirmative, and went on giving her various details until Dr. Lormier re-entered, when the girl escaped to her own room—a tiny, cell-like place, whose bare walls were ornamented by a sketch of Lyngard Court, which she had executed from memory. And there she sank on her knees, and prayed.

Dr. Lascelles' patient took a great fancy to Maraquita, which, as she was entirely under her care, was fortunate, and as the days wore on this fancy increased, until it developed on both sides into something warmer, and the two women conceived for each other a real affection.

Naturally enough, the young girl was greatly interested in the recovery of her charge, who, however, did not improve so quickly as both her physicians had expected. Sometimes she was sensible enough, and would converse with perfect coolness and reason, and then a relapse came, and her memory seemed an utter blank. Dr. Lormier grew despondent.

"I believe that what is wanted is some great shock," he said, one day, when he was discussing the case with Lascelles. "The system you adopted ought to have been successful. I have done my best, and as for our nurse—well, nothing could surpass the devotion of Sister Maraquita!"

"Nothing!" repeated Lascelles, emphatically. "In fact," he added, "I am afraid she is wearing herself out; she grows thinner and more worn-looking every day."

The elder man sighed—he, too, had noticed it.

"Yes," he said, "and not all the physicians



in the world could aid her, for she is suffering from a disease past human skill—a broken heart."

And he was right. She did not complain, or willfully give way to the terrible weariness and lassitude that oppressed her; her duties were fulfilled with a quiet regularity that left no room for more to be desired, and her tender sympathy to those who suffered never failed; only—so far as she herself was concerned—she was absolutely without hope, or interest in what went on around her, and try as she would, she could not help looking on the world as something of which she was merely a spectator, and in whose smiles and tears, loves and hatreds, she personally bore no part.

One day she was told a visitor wished to see her in the salon, and on proceeding thither, found—as she had expected—her father. He was looking rather pale—less, as it seemed, from the effects of ill-health than dissipation; and cold-hearted and selfish as he was, he could not help being shocked at the change in her appearance—now more marked than ever.

"Leave this wretched place, where I am sure you are worked to death, and come and live with me," he said, when the greetings were over. "I am not exactly rich, but I can afford to keep you in comfort, if not luxury!"

She shook her head—she knew well enough it was not the work that had made the difference to her.

"Still obstinately bent on having your own way, I observe," he remarked, sitting down, and throwing off his overcoat. "Well you must please yourself, I suppose, but I am unfeignedly sorry to see your beauty such a wreck. It is a woman's most powerful weapon, and when she has lost it—why"—shrugging his shoulders—"there can't be much left for her to live for!"

"What have you been doing since we parted?" she asked, ignoring the remark.

"Going about from place to place," he replied, but did not think it necessary to mention that the 'places' had been those where the most inveterate gamblers of Europe congregated, and where he found the excitement that had become necessary to him in the chances of cards, and the green table. Perhaps she guessed it, for she looked at him rather uneasily.

"And how," she said, hesitating a little, "how have you got on for money?"

"Well enough, on the whole. As I told you when I saw you last, I had a debt paid that had been owing me many years, and it set me on my legs—provided for the future too."

She breathed a sigh of unconscious relief, thinking to herself that now there would be no necessity for his returning to his former life, but rather wondering what the debt had been, and how it was she had never heard any allusion to it during the twelve months she had lived with him.

"Are you going to remain in Paris long?" she said, presently.

"No, I only came about a little matter of business, and finding myself so near, thought I would look you up, and see how you were getting on. I shall return to Monaco to-morrow."

He had hardly ceased speaking, before the door opened, and Dr. Lascelles entered, preceded by his patient. The eyes of the latter immediately fixed themselves on Leclerc's face in an eager gaze of inquiry that a minute later changed into startled recognition.

"Paul Leclerc!" she cried out, her voice loud and ringing, while she advanced swiftly to his side, and grasped hold of his sleeve with her two hands, as though she feared he might escape her; "at last—at last I have found you!"

(To be continued.)

Why is it that a blessing only when it is lost cuts as deep into the heart as a sharp diamond? Why must we first weep before we can love so deeply that our hearts ache?

## HER GREAT MISTAKE.

—o—

### CHAPTER X.—(continued.)

"I HAVE not been introduced to you," Cecil said. "I listened all last night, and I am sure no one spoke your name."

"I did not mean last night."

"When, then?"

"I have met you at the Court."

"At the Court?" bewildered.

"At the Court! in a crowd of rank and beauty, on the occasion romantic people call the happiest life affords!"

A light broke upon Cecil.

"You were at my cousin's wedding?"

"I was."

"And no doubt you knew his bride?"

"I knew her intimately."

"She was very sweet and lovable?"

"She was an angel!"

"You are flattering."

"I loved her," said the girl, simply, "and I think I was sorry for her."

"Sorry for her when she was her aunt's overworked drudge, not sorry for her now?"

"Yes, sorry for her now."

"But why? Surely Lady Eldale has everything heart could wish for?"

Pussy shook her head.

"She was too romantic. Florence Warburton was all heart, and to get on in this world the less heart one has the better."

"But if she won another heart in exchange, how then?"

Pussy looked strangely serious.

"I don't think I believe in love."

"Why not?"

"It brings so much sorrow. I am not speaking from experience, I never mean to love anyone as long as I live; but—"

"Don't you really? that sounds likely."

"I don't. Look at Floy! The world to her means Alan; if he fails her, her every hope is gone!"

"But he won't fail her!"

Miss Blueserge shook her head.

"People seem to me very foolish; they invest their money in many different companies, so that if one or two fail at least something may be spared them from the wreck, and they take far less care of their happiness. Women, at any rate, risk it all on one object, and if that fails, then they are one lonely blank. Captain Fane," in another tone, "will you kindly let me pass? I shall be late."

Captain Fane went home with a new sensation at his heart—she was as unlike his ideal as any woman well could be; but her intense straight-forwardness, her plain speaking, and her quiet independence had impressed him more than he would have believed.

"I must find out who she is."

To this end, when he got home he made himself so agreeable to Mrs. Fox and her daughters that he received an invitation to dinner on the following day to atone to him for his great disappointment at not having been able to join them the night before.

"Shall you go to town early this year?" he asked Mrs. Fox, artfully.

"No, not until after Easter; my husband is not very strong, and so we shall stay in the country as long as possible."

"Papa might very well stay behind," suggested Alice, to whom the thought of over two months' longer sojourn in the country was peculiarly disagreeable.

"Yes; he would not mind if he had Pussy," chimed in Bertha.

This gave Cecil an opening.

"Is Mr. Fox fond of cats?"

The girls laughed, as though it was an excellent joke.

"Pussy is our sister. Haven't you ever seen her, Captain Fane?"

"I think not."

"You must have seen her," corrected the mother. "She was at Lord Eldale's wedding; but I don't wonder at your forgetting, Captain

Fane. She is a great trial to us all. My husband has completely spoiled her."

"Pussy should have been a man," said Bertha, gently. "Papa has brought her up in such intense contempt for a lady's ideas that she really is more like a boy than a girl. Fancy, this afternoon she started off for a three-mile walk in boots resembling a plough-boy's."

Cecil knew quite well now the true name of Miss Blueserge, by which title he still thought of her in private. Oh, how he wished he had been a little more guarded in his remarks about her family!

A Miss Fox! Well, it was hard to believe that frank, open, unaffected girl—that thorough child of nature—was own sister to these befringed and beacented beauties opposite him. "Then you will come to-morrow, Captain Fane?" said Mrs. Fox at last, rising to take leave.

"You may rely upon me."

Lady Emily smiled when her son returned from attending the ladies to their carriage.

"I have solved your problem, Cecil."

"What problem, mother?"

"Your little friend of last night is Pussy Fox; I wonder I never thought of it before."

"She is very different from her sisters."

"Very! I believe she is her father's darling."

"I don't wonder."

"And, of course, it is to see her you are going to the Court to-morrow."

"Mother," said Cecil, with assumed solemnity, "don't be a wicked, mercenary, match-making old lady."

But he went to the Court the next evening, and, though Alice and Bertha engrossed him, he at least was presented to Pussy in due form. She was a very different creature here from the girl who had been the life of the Rectory dinner-table; her only object seemed to be that of keeping her father well amused. Except to this end she hardly spoke at all. She wore a tasteful costume of velvet, which was really becoming, though Cecil had the bad taste to prefer the blue serge.

"I am very angry with you."

These were the first words she spoke to him, and she said them under cover of the jingling of her cups and saucers whilst pouring out the coffee.

"Whatever for?"

"Coming here."

His interest in her slackened. If she applied his visit to herself, where was the unconsciousness he had admired?

"Why shouldn't I come?"

"Because it is cruel to deceive any girl, however foolish she may be, and it is wrong to insult people by making fun of them. You know perfectly that after your marked refusal of all invitations your dining here to-night will make my mother think her hopes are realized."

She looked across at her sisters, and Cecil perfectly understood her meaning. He never answered her in words, but he left the house that evening with a fixed determination never again to utter a disparaging remark respecting its owners.

He never went to the Court again. He parried invitations to it most successfully, but he and Pussy met elsewhere. Mrs. Dale was taken into Cecil's confidence, and having all a true woman's delight in a love affair, she threw the pair together with all the goodwill in the world, and Cecil was very much in love when he took that journey into Kent to see his cousin.

But in his absence great trouble fell upon the Court. Alice eloped with a good-looking young actor whom, in an evil moment, Tony had brought home months before, and who had been corresponding ever since with the wilful young heiress.

Cecil's first impulse was to go and comfort Pussy, and he followed his impulse to such good purpose that the girl confessed his sympathy and affection were very precious to her.

"But I couldn't marry you," she said naively. "Mamma wants you for Bertha. They would all hate me if I took her place."

Cecil persuaded and argued, pleaded, and threatened. At last he took away with him Puss's solemn promise that she would marry him some day or other, only not for a great many years, and no one was to know of their engagement, because its termination was so very remote and doubtful.

Cecil had his own opinion on this last point, but he was too prudent to risk what he had already gained by pressing for more. He obtained Puss's consent to take his mother into their confidence, if he should deem it necessary, and was also allowed, as a very great privilege indeed, to press his lips to Puss's calm open forehead, and to carry away with him a portrait of her in the famous blue serge; but he was told, as an antidote for this indiscretion on the part of his beloved, that twenty years was quite short for an engagement, and that she should never dare to say she had promised to marry him until a husband had been found for Bertha.

Cecil shook his head sadly, and told her nothing could alter two things—they loved each other, and they meant to be married some day.

## CHAPTER XI.

THERE was nothing revolting about the house in Caroline-street. It was grim and unattractive, to be sure; but there were no broken windows, no discoloured walls. Only coming from her own luxurious home it seemed to Lady Elsdale all too painful that her mother should live in such a place. Cecil Fane put one hand appealingly on her arm.

"Must you go?" he asked her, gently. "Oh, Florence, be advised; trust me with your secret, and let me be your ambassador! Indeed—indeed, this is no place for you!"

The young Countess looked at him with wistful eyes.

"If she spends her life here," she said, sadly, "surely I can bear to pass half-an-hour here; if it is good enough for her home I need not be ashamed to call here."

Cecil felt bewildered—he had no power, no authority to stop her. He told the cabman to wait, and followed her up the rickety steps.

A stately woman opened the door and stood aghast at the brilliant creature who stood there. She answered Florence's questions civilly enough, and showed her the way upstairs.

When she returned she found Cecil still waiting. The young officer slipped half-a-sovereign into her horny hand.

"Who is this Miss Daw?"

"She is a decent body," answered the woman, pocketing the coin greedily. "One as has a civil word for everyone. I was taken aback when the lady asked for her; she has lodged with me for over a dozen years, and no one ever asked for her before."

"But who is she?"

"I can't tell you that, sir. May be she's been a lady once, and has had trouble. She works as hard as any in this street—harder than many; but her hands are soft and white still, and she speaks different from the folks about here."

Greater still seemed the mystery to Cecil. He waited nearly an hour; impatiently enough, for he was going down to Westfield that afternoon, in obedience to a strange summons; but not even for his Puss could he have left Florence Dane alone in such a street.

She came down at last. Her eyes red with crying, a strange hushiness in her voice.

"You should not have waited."

"I could not leave you here alone."

He handed her into the cab, and they drove off. For some time neither spoke.

"Florence."

He often used her name thus. She was his cousin's wife. To him too, it always seemed he had a special right to care for her, since he had been her father's trusted friend.

"Yes."

"Do you remember our first meeting, it is not quite a year ago?"

"I remember it perfectly."

"You were in trouble then, and you trusted me; you promised to let me be your friend. You are something more than my friend now. As Alan's wife you must be dear to me as a younger sister. Won't you tell me what is grieving you now?"

"I cannot."

"Try."

"You could not help me."

"Try me."

"Her tears were falling fast. Mr. Fane took the two little hands in his."

"You ought to have no sorrows. You are young and beautiful. You have a husband who idolizes you."

She shook her head.

"Florence! reproachfully."

"He does not love me now," she said, simply. "It was all a mistake; he told me so to-day."

"He could not have."

"Yes, he said we had been too hasty. Cecil, I am not blind; I know quite well his heart has gone from me. If I were dead he would marry Lady Dane."

"Rubbish!"

"I am sure of it!"

"My dear child!" said Cecil, with paternal tenderness, "you are making yourself miserable for nothing; Alan loves your little finger better than he loves Lady Dane's whole body."

"He is never with me. I ought not to say it, but you are his own cousin. Do you think he seems happy?"

"No," said Cecil, frankly. "I believe there is some wretched misunderstanding between you, which is spoiling both your lives. But there is no want of love on Alan's side."

"And I love him as my own life! I think I would die to make him happy!"

"Would it make him happy to know where you have been just now?"

"No."

"Florence, I don't press for your confidence; but you are so young and artless, you don't know the snares of the world. Little cousin, you ought never to go anywhere your husband would object to."

The girl turned to him with a little gasping cry,—

"But she is my mother, Cecil! I owe my life to her, and she is so unhappy."

"Your mother?" asked; "but she is dead, her loss broke your father's heart."

"She did not die."

"But—?"

"Cruel malice parted them. My mother was too proud to defend herself; in a moment's anger she went away. Cecil, since that time her life has been one long regret; for more than sixteen years she has lived a living death. She never knew how much she had hoped for a reconciliation until she saw my father's death in the *Times*."

"And how did she find you out?"

"She came down to Foxgrove a week before my wedding, and contrived to see me. I think she meant me to believe her a friend of my parents; but I guessed the truth. Her voice seemed to awake some half-forgotten memory."

"But why should she live in poverty, while you are wealthy?"

"I have asked myself that a dozen times."

"And Alan?"

Florence blushed crimson.

"He does not know."

"Not know!"

"She would not let me tell him. She said he would scorn me if he knew I was her daughter, and I— Oh! Cecil, I loved him so I could not bear to risk the loss of his love, and so I kept it secret!"

The young man was silent. Seeing her sweet, wistful face still wet with tears, he could not blame her; and yet he felt she had made a great mistake.

"Will you tell him now, Florence?" he said, kindly. "Alan may have found out you have a secret, and resent your not sharing it with him. Little cousin, be advised; tell your story to your husband just as you have told it to me."

"I couldn't!" she gasped. "I promised not."

"Your mother would release you from your promise sooner than shadow your happiness."

"But he would be so grieved—so hurt at the connection."

"I think not. I fancy, Florence, Alan loves you too well to mind anything so that he knows you are all his own."

The cab stopped at Lord Elsdale's town mansion. Cecil alighted and handed out the Countess.

"You will think of my advice," he said, brightly. "I shall find a happy home here when I come back from the country."

He sprang into the cab and was driven rapidly towards the station. Florence watched him till he was out of sight; then she rang the bell, and was admitted by her own pompous butler.

She had quite resolved to take Cecil's advice, and tell her husband the cruel secret which had been—although she knew it not—the cause of their estrangement. Nothing could be more painful than the terms on which they lived now; even Alan's open anger would be preferable to his cold indifference.

She took unusual pains with her toilet that night. She wanted to remind Alan of the little girl he had found in the wood. The maid dressed her in a short costume, made in simple, girlish fashion. She wore no jewels or ornaments; nothing in the coils of her hair but one single white ribbon.

"She looks like a rose herself," murmured the maid, as she went downstairs. "I'm quite glad to see my lady take a little interest in her dress again. Generally she sits like a lay statue, and lets me put on what I please."

The Countess went downstairs to the drawing-room, and waited for her husband's coming. The minutes seemed as hours to her, and yet he did not come. Presently the butler appeared to announce dinner.

"I will wait for the Earl."

"His lordship will not be home, my lady. He left a note for you."

Yes, there was the note lying on the centre-table, under her very eyes as she rose, and yet she had not seen it. She took it up, her eyes lingering lovingly upon the address; it was the first time she had ever seen her present title in Alan's writing—positively this was the first letter she had ever had from her husband.

She opened it with a smile of pleasure, which faded quickly as she saw the first lines. As she read on she was conscious of a strange, dumb despair. It seemed to her that the bitterness of death was entering into her soul.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE Foxes had not gone to London for the season. Alice's escapade had so thoroughly upset the health of the senior partner in the domestic firm, by which we mean Mrs. Fox, that she had been glad to yield for once to her husband's wishes, and remain quietly at the Court.

Bertha was entrusted to the care of a relative—no other than her aunt, Miss Warburton; and Puss was kept at home, partly because her father would have been miserable without her; partly, it must be confessed, because Mrs. Fox cared very little to impose the care of a second marriageable young lady upon her particular and fidgety sister.

"Puss will never marry in her own sphere," she remarked, amiably, to her husband. "I shall keep her under my own eyes as long as possible, and then I shall at least have some warning of the blow she inflicts upon us."

Mr. Fox was not going to hear his favourite condemned undefended.

"Puss is a right-down good girl!" he said,



with more courage than he often showed. "She'll never marry a man she need be ashamed of, which is a little more than we can say for her sister."

"The two girls are not to be compared, dear. Alice's feelings—"

"I am not blaming Alice," returned the father; "but I won't hear a word against my little Pussy! If she'd only favour a nice, steady young man, I'd give them the management of the business to-morrow!"

Mr. Fox deemed this the greatest honour in his power to bestow. He was master of the Court. He was a country squire, but he was never quite so happy as in the days when he lived over his little shop, and took a leading part in the preparation of the delicacy to which he owed his fortune.

"Mr. Fox," cried his lady, "do forget that miserable place!"

"I shall never forget it, my dear! I've but one son, and you insisted he should be brought up as a gentleman; but I think of hard there's none of my own kind and him to take a hand at the old place."

So the family at the Court settled down, and no one noticed as the spring wore on a decided change in Pussy. She walked about the estate with her father as much as ever; she spent quite as many hours with him in his study, pouring over accounts; she was still Mrs. Dale's right hand in parish matters, but she was something more. The shade of loudness, the touch of fastness, which had threatened to spoil her, was completely gone.

Pussy took to practicing her music and making calls with her mother. A nameless something refined her, while manner and expression—

She had always been amiable, but she had never been so charming as in these early weeks of her engagement to Cecil Fox.

She had never told him her strongest reason for wishing their engagement kept secret. Pussy was quite conscious of her own defects; from a young lady's point of view, and she wanted to test her lover's affection by the sorest proof—constant intimacy.

Lady Emily Fox, a little dull and lonely now her son was away, welcomed Pussy's visits warmly. She had a little suspicion how dear girl was one day to be to her, and she had always liked her frank, free manner; and now that Pussy had set herself the task of creeping into the gentle widow's heart she did not find it very difficult.

Cecil and his betrothed corresponded very regularly. How Pussy contrived to receive his letters unknown to the rest of her family is perplexing, but she certainly did contrive it; and all things were going very pleasantly with her when in an evil hour the beloved son and heir took it into his head to return to Foxgrove Court, accompanied by a friend and companion, the Honourable Reginald Daeres.

"Such a charming acquaintance for dear Tony!" said Mrs. Fox to her daughter, as she read the tidings one morning at breakfast. "An earl's son, Pussy. Mr. Daeres belongs to one of the first families in England!"

"I wonder at his coming now, mamma!" "Surely it is natural, he should accompany his friend?"

"But the season is full, and Tony's society can't be much compensation for deserting London now."

"You always did undertake your brother, Pussy," said Mrs. Fox, much aggrieved.

"No, I don't, mamma; only I can't make it out. Tony never has come before at this time."

"Have we ever been here before in April?"

"No, but—"

"I can't hear another word," said Tony and Mr. Daeres will be here to-morrow. Un- fortunately neither of your older sisters will be at home, so it will be your duty to attend in every way to our guest."

A strange presentiment of ill was at Pussy's heart. There was a shade of uneasiness which struck Lady Emily as well when the girl

walked into her pleasant drawing-room that afternoon.

"What is the matter, dear?" she exclaimed.

"I don't know," said Pussy, simply.

"But you must know what is troubling you, surely!"

"I ought not to be troubled, only we have had such a quiet, pleasant time, and now it is all to be interrupted."

"What is going to happen?"

"My brother is coming home to-morrow."

There was a strange jump in the girl's throat. Lady Emily, who had no admiration for Tony, understood a little of what was passing in her mind.

"I dare say Mr. John Fox will not find much to detain him in the country at this time of year."

"He talks of staying several weeks. Of course, I ought to be glad to see him, but Tony has never been much to the rest of us. He and mamma always seem to have been wrapped up in each other. Besides, he brings a friend. Pussy having to entertain a strange gentleman for several weeks!"

Lady Emily looked a little scrutinizingly at her favourite.

"Pussy, do you know your puzzle me?"

"Do I? How?"

"Most girls of your age are not at all adverse to gentlemen's society. Now your sister—"

"Don't!" said the girl, pleadingly. "Do you think I have forgotten all that went on this winter? Do you think I don't know how you must despise them?"

"I never despised them, Pussy. It is much more natural to act as they did than to avoid gentlemen as strenuously as you do!"

"Do I?"

"Of course you do! I think sometimes, Pussy, you must have an unfortunate attachment."

Pussy looked straight into her face. "I have an attachment," she said, simply; "perhaps that is why I care so very little for gentlemen in general. My whole heart is given away, and so I haven't any to spend in flirtations!"

"Do you mean you are engaged? I never had the least idea of it."

"Well, we are not exactly engaged," returned Pussy, quietly. "We understand each other!"

"My dear girl, what do you mean?"

"I have quite made up my mind. I shall never marry anyone else!"

"But your parents won't consent. Is that what you mean?"

"No, they have no idea of it. I would not tell them until I was quite sure."

"But, my dear, you said just now you were quite sure!"

"Of myself!"

"And not of him? Oh! Pussy; surely you have never given your love to a man unworthy of your trust!"

"You don't understand," said Pussy, stamping her foot a little impatiently. "You don't understand the least bit in the world; he is worthy of anything, only we hadn't known each other very long, and I was quite unlike the kind of girl he ought to marry, so I persuaded him not to say anything to papa just yet, in case he should change his mind. He is going to spend the season in London, you know, and he will see all kinds of people there."

Lady Emily gazed at the girl in undiminished admiration.

"He will never meet a truer heart than yours, Pussy," she said, affectionately. "I should like to know your fiancé very much."

"You shall some day. I will introduce him to you—unless he changes his mind."

"You don't really think he will do that?"

"I don't know. I couldn't blame him if he did. He was free—quite free. I told him so."

"But you would be hurt."

"It would break my heart," said Pussy, bluntly; "but, then, that would be better

than marrying him and finding out he didn't really care for me."

"You have strange notions."

"Perhaps."

"And how shall you amuse Mr. John and his friend? They will be quite on your hands this time, now you are the only grown-up daughter at home."

"I hope they will amuse themselves. Tony never cares for womenkind. I dare say Mr. Daeres is of the same type."

"Mr. Daeres. Is his Christian name Reginald?"

"Yes."

A strange look of pain crossed the widow's gentle face.

"I thought Reginald Daeres had so conducted himself that no house was open to him?"

Pussy shrugged her shoulders.

"I fancy mamma would welcome Mr. Satan himself if he were introduced as a great friend of Tony's, and had the right to put Honourable before his name."

To her surprise, Lady Emily laid one hand upon her shoulder.

"Don't jest, my dear, I can't bear it."

For a moment the two women kept silence. Then Pussy said gently,—

"Dear Lady Emily, did he ever hurt you? You speak so bitterly I think he must. It is not like you to speak harshly of anyone."

"He killed my child, Pussy."

"Your child?"

"Ay, you thought, perhaps, Cecil was my only one, but I had a daughter, Pussy, as fair and true a girl as the sun ever shone upon. She was older than Cecil. He was only a boy when it all happened."

Pussy listened eagerly.

"Did she love him?"

"Ay, and they were engaged. A handsome couple people called them, for Reginald Daeres was a splendid-looking man, and Sylvia was wonderfully beautiful."

"Did he marry her?"

Lady Emily shook her head.

"He had believed her portion far larger than it was. When he learned the truth he forsook her."

"He could not," cried Pussy; "no man would be so shameful."

"He forsook her," repeated Lady Emily; "he transferred his attentions to her greatest friend, an heiress."

"And she could accept them?"

"He was a wonderfully fascinating man, and the young lady had no idea how far things had gone between him and Sylvia; my darling died on the morning of his wedding day."

Pussy shuddered.

"And was he good to the other girl—the heiress?"

"I cannot tell you, but he was terribly disappointed. She died within six months of the wedding day, and as there was no child all her fortune returned to her own family. He was not the richer by sixpence for his marriage."

"And now?"

"That is eight years ago. In those eight years I have heard much of Mr. Daeres, but never anything to his advantage; he has drunk, gambled, betted, and become one of the fastest, most unprincipled men about town."

Pussy shuddered.

"And mamma is going to receive him as an honoured guest. Well, he'll find the Court too quiet for his taste. I don't expect we shall be honoured with his company long."

"And your heart is safe in a good man's keeping," said Lady Emily, gently. "Reginald Daeres could not win for the plying of an hour as he did my poor child's."

Pussy bent and kissed the widow's gentle face.

"My heart is quite proof against Mr. Daeres' fascinations; besides, you know I am not an heiress."

Which was hardly correct, since her father's immense wealth was so well known that any one of his children could expect an ample

dower so that they married with his consent and approval.

Pussy felt not a little curious for her introduction to Reginald Dacres. If he had been married and lost his wife eight years ago he could not be very young, and he could not be very clever; or he would not care for her brother Tony's society; on the whole, Pussy pictured an elderly beau, a little pompous and affected in manner.

She was dressing when the arrivals took place, and it was late when she came downstairs to find the party assembled in the drawing-room.

Tony, looking sulky and a little tired, was talking to his mother. A stranger sat in a low chair near the door conversing with Mr. Fox.

All Pussy's preconceived ideas received a sudden shock. This could not be the hero of Lady Emily's story, a man who looked barely thirty, and who had all the beauty of a Greek god; tall and muscular, his head well set on his broad shoulders, the face perfect in the classic regularity of its features, the hair bright, curling brown, and the eyes dark, intense blue; a man who would have been looked at even in a crowd, and who, standing near such specimens of his sex as Tony and his father, looked a creature from another sphere.

It was a very striking face, but he had an unpleasant trait or rather two; the dark eyes hardened in their gaze as though they never wavered anything steadily, and there were so many lines upon the brow as to induce the belief that things had not always gone smoothly with the Honourable Reginald.

Tony performed the introduction. Pussy meant simply to have bowed, but Mr. Dacres put out his hand, and as her father's guest she could hardly refuse to take it. A moment later and she found herself going into dinner on his arm, Tony, in defiance of all rules of etiquette, himself leading his mother.

"At last," murmured the stranger in a low, wooing tone; "you can have no idea, Miss Fox, how eagerly I have looked forward to this moment. Warburton has talked so often of his sister that I can hardly believe we meet as strangers."

Pussy stared, she could not help it. Tony simply regarded sisters as insufferable nuisances, and took no trouble to hide his opinion. That he should choose them as a subject of conversation with his fine London friends was highly improbable, but she never betrayed her unbelief, save by that calm, steady gaze, and Reginald never imagined his word was doubted.

But Pussy's presentiment of discomfort arising from that visit was only too fully realized. From the very moment of Tony's coming a sense of constraint seemed to pervade the Court. He and his father had never pulled well together; they did so less than ever now. The heir and her mother were often closeted together in Mrs. Fox's boudoir, and once or twice Pussy discovered her mother in tears after these interviews.

As to herself, the whole care of entertaining Mr. Dacres fell upon her shoulders. For beyond bringing him to the Court, Tony seemed to have no regard for his comfort or amusement; indeed, more than once Pussy doubted if such a great friendship did subsist between them. For more than once she had heard their voices raised high in discussion, and it seemed to her that the discussion was of no very cordial character.

If her heart had been free, if she had never heard Lady Emily's story Reginald Dacres might have had a great attraction for Pussy, but as it was the girl had no room in her thoughts for any image but Cecil's. With Pussy, like her cousin Florence, to love once was to love for ever; and so the fascinating stranger might have spared himself the trouble and the compliments he bestowed upon her.

She was never rude or inhospitable; she rode with Mr. Dacres when occasion required it; she let him accompany her in her walks, though she generally took one of the children

from the school-room as a safeguard; but she never gave Mr. Dacres room to imagine he was more to her than her brother's guest, and not being a simpleton he was quite aware of it.

"Tony," he said, angrily, one night when he had been at the Court a fortnight, walking unceremoniously into the heir's bedroom, "this won't do at all; you are not keeping your promise."

John Warburton Fox closed the door carefully, and sat down opposite his friend with a strangely troubled face.

"You my word, Reginald, I don't know what you mean—I don't, really."

"Nonsense! Don't you know the understanding on which you brought me here?"

"You were precious glad to come."

"Don't be quite so free, young man. Remember, that acceptance is still in my possession; you'd better wait until it is in yours before you quarrel with me."

Tony wiped his face, the perspiration stood on his brow in great beads, and yet it was not a warm night; the weather, indeed, was remarkably cold for April.

"I don't want to quarrel."

"You'd better not."

"What do you want of me?"

"I want you to fulfil your promise."

"I'm sure I've done all I could. I brought you here, sung your praises carefully, and left you free play with the girl. I can't help it if you don't get on."

"I must have money," said Dacres, coldly;

"I see no way of getting it but by a wealthy marriage. You say your sister will have ten thousand pounds on her wedding-day."

"They all have that. I expect Pussy will have more; she is the old man's favourite, always was."

"All the more reason she should become the Honourable Mrs. Dacres."

"You'd better tell her so."

Reginald sneered.

"I'm not a conceited man, and I understand women pretty well. Your sister is proof against my fascinations; she will never marry me unless a little brotherly persuasion is brought to bear."

"I don't believe that'll help you. Pussy and I never pulled well together."

"But you say she is fond of your father."

"Awfully!"

"She will probably reflect that it wouldn't be a pleasant thing for him to see his heir in the dock on the charge of forgery. You need not tremble so, man! You know it's all true."

Tony wiped his face.

"You told me you'd destroyed that bill. I paid you the money again and again."

"Ay, but I couldn't afford to be without such a nice little influence over you. The bill is not destroyed! It will probably be inspected by a jury of your countrymen, unless you persuade the fair Pussy to be my bride, or raise me a comfortable sum of money by some other means."

"Hang it! you know I have no other means?"

"You ought to have! The heir of Foxgrove could, surely, raise money on *post obit*!"

"Ay, but the place is not entailed, and the governor's constitution is worth two of mine—he's a stronger man, and hasn't played ducks and drakes with himself as I have."

"Well," rising up, "you know my terms. I give you a week."

John Warburton Fox trembled. There is no other word.

"Dacres!"

"Well?"

"You'd be good to her. Pussy and I are not very devoted to each other; but, hang it, I'm not scoundrel enough to make my own sister wretched!"

Dacres' face softened strangely.

"I will be good to her," he said, firmly. "I daresay you'll think it cant that a fellow who has lived as I have can know much of what love is. But if ever man loved woman I love your sister."

"You love Pussy?"

"Yes."

"But we always looked on her as the family failure. My mother never thinks anything of Pussy."

Reginald's face brightened.

"I think the whole world of her, Fox! So much so that if she is my wife I wouldn't despair of facing any danger!"

Tony stared.

"And if she refuses?"

"I shall revenge myself on her—and you! But she won't refuse, properly managed."

"And you want me to speak to her?"

"Please yourself about that. You know the alternative if you don't."

Pussy was surprised the following day. As she was setting out for a walk Tony appeared, also equipped for exercise, and, without excuse or reason, joined her. Mr. Dacres, whom she had expected as escort, was detained at home writing letters.

"Pussy," began the luckless Tony, as they started leisurely down the avenue, "I have always been very fond of you."

"Have you?" innocently. "Well, do you know, Tony, I never should have guessed it."

This was not a propitious commencement, but Tony persevered:

"And, of course, your happiness is dear to me."

"Thank you!"

"I can't see you wilfully disregarding certain felicity without a word of remonstrance."

"Have you got your speech written down?" asked Pussy, mischievously. "I'm sure those grand words never came out of your own head!"

"Pussy!"

"Well!—what felicity am I disregarding?"

Tony plunged into the subject, and urged his friend's suit loyally, displaying such an interest in the matter that the quick-witted Pussy instantly understood that he was not unconcerned in the success.

"Don't trouble yourself to say any more," she answered, bluntly. "Mr. Dacres may have all the good qualities you ascribe to him, but even so it would make no difference. If he were Apollo and Jupiter rolled into one I wouldn't marry him!"

Tony had not any very clear idea of who Apollo and Jupiter were.

"He is son of an English earl, Pussy. He might make you a countess."

"Only I'd rather not."

"Don't be a simpleton, Pussy! The matter is serious; you must marry Reginald!"

"Tony, the matter is most serious, but I shan't!"

"Do you know, you are the most ungrateful, good-for-nothing girl!"

"Then your friend ought to be very much obliged to me for my refusal."

"You will yield yet."

She faced round on him.

"There is something beneath this, Tony! Mr. Dacres is no child. If he wants to marry me why doesn't he tell me so himself, instead of making you his messenger?"

"He would tell you if you gave him the slightest encouragement."

"Which I shan't!"

Tony was losing courage.

"You are very fond of the governor."

"I love my father."

"Then, for his sake, you can't refuse."

"Dad would be the last person to wish me to marry a man I didn't like."

"But if it was to spare him pain?"

"It wouldn't."

Tony got fairly out of temper. He told his sister, in plain English, the hold Dacres had over him, and how, if she persisted in her refusal to marry Reginald Dacres, he must stand in a felon's dock.

Pussy was not so impressed as he expected. She had so little real affection for her brother that she could view the facts of the case quite easily. She saw that Mr. Dacres had everything to lose, nothing to gain by the exposure and that a liberal cheque would buy his silence just as surely as her hand.

(To be continued.)



## OUT IN THE SNOW.

—o—

Our in the snow who would be with this storm  
at height,  
When the warm hearth-glow its blessing im-  
parts?  
Yet, behold yonder, in tatters each form  
bedight,  
Three, perchance houseless, with woe at their  
hearts!  
Ay, and one also a child! How inhuman there,  
Seems it that she in such plight should be  
drawn!  
S'ay! there are four. 'Tis a babe which the  
woman there  
Bundles so tightly her worn breast upon!  
Vagrants? Nay, hardly. A half-independent  
look,  
Foreign to vagrancy, stern and inborn.  
Lurks, that will not, though with fortunes de-  
scendent, brook  
Self-respect's exile, effrontery's scorn.  
Sickness and loss, like a chain, may have  
weighed on them,  
Death, through some dear one, have lent a  
last blow,  
Or, sadder still, dispossession have preyed on  
them  
Even to-day, and now—out in the snow!  
Mark the poor woman's response, in mute  
gratitude,  
To the man's pretence of shielding her  
still—  
How, for the child-trudger's sake, with a  
latitude  
Pitifully quaint, both despise the air's chill!  
Hapless their lot, such as long years of trust-  
lessness  
In the world's goodness strikes deep in the  
heart,  
Still half-resigned to distress, want and crust-  
lessness,  
Knowing these shared by each—still not  
apart!  
How, with regrets, it may be, of once better  
days  
Peopling their minds, as ghosts haunt houses  
lone,  
While ever closer Despair its harsh fetter lays  
Crushing out what might to solace have  
grown,  
Back swoon their thoughts to the present's grim  
cheerlessness  
Closing around them, with nowhere to go,  
Out of which, may be, Sin, born of this tearless-  
ness,  
Whispers its promptings out there in the  
snow!  
Vagrants? Not yet. Soft, soft as the flakes de-  
scend,  
Earth's freezing bosom to comfort and warm,  
Pitying Heaven! pray send for their sakes a  
friend,  
Ere in their breasts springs a yet wilder storm  
Than from the wintry sky swoops—gloomy pon-  
derings,  
Desperate resolves, with mad instincts aglow.  
Misery-bowed hearts! from your peril-girl  
wanderings,  
Turn, turn this way, and come in from the  
snow.

N. U. R.

## FOUND WANTING.

## CHAPTER XXII.

PROBABLY in the whole vast city that splendid  
summer day there was no more unhappy being  
than Albert Delmar as he walked back to his  
hotel.

Baffled at every turn, his illusions destroyed,  
the love he had sinned for shaken to its centre,  
his own gifts wasted, his blessings scattered to  
the wind, he had no hopes, no foothold, no  
place of rest in the whole wide earth.

He was worn and weary with conflict, almost  
ready to lie down and die, save for his im-  
placable, burning hatred against the man who  
had added one more wrong to his first injury.

He had no distinct volition in all he did after  
he left Maddie. He did not think "I will go  
home." He followed some blind impulse, not  
feeling he was led, turning homewards as a  
wounded animal does.

For he had previously made up his mind  
that he could not return to Daneswood until he  
had at least seen Christine, and here he found  
himself driving to the station with no change  
in his position, and no idea what explanation  
to offer the household.

But, in fact, though he only conjectured such  
to be the case, no explanation would have been  
really accepted.

The servants, as well as the neighbourhood,  
had formed their own conclusions, and the  
gossip Delmar had dreaded went glibly round.

He had some papers with him, but could  
not read them; he made the effort, for very  
pride's sake—but pride had, even in this small  
thing, to yield.

He laid them aside and sat looking out on  
the familiar country, each minute, as the train  
sped onwards, intensifying his power to feel,  
lessening his power to think.

Failure, failure, from first to last—revenge  
that had looked so alluring—that was to have  
been the dear sustainer and compensation, had  
brought with it such terrible gifts that its beauty  
had turned to hideousness. Even this very  
day he had been conquered by the one being  
he had thought he could mould to his will, and  
conquered not by her higher, but by her lower  
nature.

Between himself and his wife stood his  
enemy, who had frustrated all his efforts to  
communicate with her. And yet it was not  
this side of his retrospect that seemed breaking  
the proud man's heart—not the failure he  
must take from others, but the failure he had  
wrought himself.

Like an inevitable fate the train rushed on  
through the sunlit country, peaceful and fair,  
and late in the afternoon drew up at Knights  
Milwood.

Delmar was out of the carriage before the  
train had stopped, and came face to face with  
Evans, to whom he had telegraphed to bring  
his favourite chestnut.

He waited till Colin was released from his  
durance vile, and came rushing up to him,  
caressed him, and then became aware the ser-  
vant was waiting.

"Is there anything else, sir?" asked the  
man, as Delmar passed out of the station to  
where a porter held the chestnut. "Mrs.  
Forster asked me to go a message in the  
village, and I will fetch your portmanteau as  
I come back."

"That will do—and, Evans, take Colin with  
you. The poor beast has been shut up and  
will like the run." He sprang into the saddle  
and bent down to take from Evans the light  
riding-whip the Emperor never felt. "Stay,"  
he added, as the man, touching his hat, was  
going away. "Jim"—the porter—"will  
bring up the portmanteau—it will delay you  
to fetch it, and I may want you. No, Colin,  
not with me."

The dog hesitated, divided between his love  
for his master and his knowledge that with  
Evans he would get a longer run, in which  
his doggieish soul delighted, but another gentle,  
but firm "No, Colin," decided him, and he  
rushed off.

Delmar, putting his horse to a walking  
pace, turned into the tree-shaded lane which,  
after many turns, eventuated at the Daneswood  
gates. The reins hung loose on the Emperor's  
glossy, arched neck, just held in the rider's  
listless fingers, who was thinking of anything  
but the still beauty of the hour and scene.  
So, till a lonely bit of road was reached, not far  
from Daneswood, then there came across  
Delmar's gaze—for he was looking straight  
before him—the sight of the first human being  
he had passed since he left the station. Some-  
thing in the figure, distant as it was, arrested

his attention. He lifted himself from his  
drooping position and watched the advancing  
pedestrian—a tall man, who walked slowly, as  
if tired, and carried a gun. He came nearer,  
and, like a flash, Delmar's face changed. The  
hot blood rushed over it and back again,  
like fire through every quivering vein. Up  
leapt, in its wildest strength, the passion that  
had only slept that day because other passions  
had been stronger.

But this now, at sight of the man who  
had made him what he was, bore down all else  
—it was his master, and, without an instant's  
pause or thought, he flung himself from his  
horse.

Pelham Clifford, who had seen the action,  
recoiled; and well he might before the un-  
controlled fury in the other's face.

"At last!" said Delmar, hoarsely. "An-  
swer me now—here—for the wrongs you have  
heaped on me—"

"Keep back!" said Clifford, stepping away  
from Delmar. "You are mad to challenge me  
like that! Think one moment—remember  
Christine—"

It was a fatal word.

"You have come between us—you are keep-  
ing her from me!" Delmar said, half  
frantically. "Deny it if you dare!"

"Ay!" cried Clifford, his slower nature  
roused to the other's fire. "I have—and I  
will—"

Delmar heard, waited for no more. The  
words seemed to snap what last remnant of  
control he might have had. He sprang forward,  
seizing Clifford in a grasp that rendered him  
powerless, and twice, thrice drew the riding-  
whip sharply and savagely across his face.

Blinded and maddened Clifford wrenched  
himself free, and lifting his gun to his shoulder  
fired straight and true. He saw the horse  
start away as the report echoed again and  
again—he saw Delmar reel back and striving  
to keep his footing, put out his hands wildly.  
A mist as of blood came between him and that  
vision of a white, dying face, and then he was  
kneeling on the long grass, and saw nothing in  
Heaven or earth but the prostrate form at his  
feet.

He was paralysed and helpless. He could  
not even call for aid; he forgot his sportsman's  
flask which he always carried; he could only  
lay the bright head on his knee and make  
some effort to staunch the fast-flowing blood  
that was dying the long, cool grass.

"Oh, Heaven!" he said, at last, "he is  
dying! Albert, look up," but there was no  
answer. "Albert," again, this time in an  
agonized whisper, "only once, for Maddie's  
sake!"

Breathlessly he bent lower. What strange  
spell had that name to call back the dying  
spirit out of the dark shadows that were  
closing around it? It seemed to pause, to  
stand still, as if it waited. Not slowly but  
suddenly the white lids were lifted, and the  
blue eyes looked straight upwards with a long,  
straining, unearthly gaze. The rigid lips just  
moved; so faint was the scarcely breathed  
word that left them the listener barely caught  
it—"Christine!"

A wild, sharp cry that startled himself, a  
rustling sound, and then a shaggy form  
bounded up, and a man's voice exclaiming in  
horror. These were what Pelham Clifford saw  
and heard after what seemed to him like hours  
of unconsciousness.

"He is dead," he said, not moving.

"Got your flask, sir?" asked Evans, not  
wasting words; and kneeling down poured a  
few drops of wine between Delmar's lips. It  
had not the slightest effect. Evans asked no  
questions, but bidding Clifford do what he  
could to check the flow of blood ran off to the  
house at full speed. But Colin would not  
follow him. After licking his master's hand  
and whining pitifully, he had laid down close  
beside him, watching him, not deigning to  
notice Pelham beyond one rather unfriendly  
glance. There was, to the wretched man,

something eerie in the faithful brute's silent guard.

Clifford was a passive spectator of all that followed, yet noticed the most minute particulars—one of the men catch Emperor's bridle and pick up the riding-whip and the fatal gun. Nobody asked him any questions nor made any remark save Evans, who merely said, phlegmily, "It's a terrible accident, sir," and Pelham assented.

Then they would not touch him a murderer. He breathed more freely, lifted his head, and ventured to glance round.

It was Evans who assumed the command of his assistants, which Clifford ought to have taken. They reached the house by slow degrees; fortunately it was not far, and, arrived there, Pelham would not go upstairs. He ascertained the doctor had been sent for and would arrive almost directly, and went into the dining room, where a servant waited on him, explaining that Mrs. Forster was busy upstairs. Then he was left alone till the same servant came to say the doctor would like to see him. Tremblingly Pelham obeyed the summons. In a dull, nervous dread that recalled his paralysed feelings of an hour ago. As if he were entering a death-chamber he stepped into the wide, airy room, full of light and bright with pretty things; close up to the low, white bed, on the other side of which the doctor sat.

Mrs. Forster respectfully made way for her mistress's brother. Clifford stood looking down on the face so changed already—it might have been cut out in marble; the pencilled brows stood out sharply defined; the long lashes looked almost black against the deathly pallor of the softly curved cheek; the lips, the hands, were bloodless. There was not the faintest movement, not the lightest breath to show that he lived. Clifford would have liked to cry out but he could not; he was too oppressed, too dazed, and, besides, that was so like a dead face.

"Impossible he can live," a voice grew out of the blackness saying those awful words, and a woman's voice answered, mournfully, "My poor mistress!"

With a cry of agony Clifford sank down, and burst into tears.

"Christine! Christine! my darling!" he sobbed. Oh, how will you look at me? What will you say?"

"Dear Mr. Clifford," said the good old housekeeper, gently, "it's terrible, certain, but who can help an accident? We are all in Heaven's hands."

Again—an accident—no other thought entered anyone's head. Clifford rose, calmer, more himself. Ashamed as he was of his tears they had relieved him. He could tell the doctor collectedly how it had happened. He had been shooting, and had left his party to return by train to the house where he was staying, carrying his gun on full cock in case any rabbits came across him, as he knew he was on his brother-in-law's land. He had met Delmar, and, forgetting this, had handled the gun carelessly, and it had gone off.

The doctor, a clever man, who knew Delmar well, and always attended the household, never doubted a word of the well-told story, and sympathised deeply with the teller of it, the more so as he saw no hope.

"Is Mrs. Delmar in London?" he said. "She had better be telegraphed for—she may get the next train. He may live through the night, but I doubt it. The wound is so near vital parts. I have stopped the bleeding, but I cannot get back consciousness. He has lain like that ever since he was brought home. He spoke, you say, once?"

"Once—only one word. Will he—will he never speak again?"

"I can't tell. Very little can be done at present. Of course I shall stay the night. Mrs. Forster will kindly send for Mrs. Delmar."

"No, I will see to that," said Clifford, hastily.

He turned gladly from the sight of the silent form and changeless face, gladly sought relief

in action; and, veiling his eyes, went out; and the message was flung out to Christine, waiting in London in a nameless apprehension.

Mrs. Forster went to make preparations for her mistress, and Dr. Hall was left in the darkening room with his dying patient—alone, save for the housemaid who had never left the room since his master had been brought into it, and lay now beside the bed, watchful and listening.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE servants were gathered in the kitchen discussing the events of the afternoon. Evans had gone to the station to meet the train by which Christine was expected, and Mrs. Forster, alone in her own room, was preparing something the doctor had ordered.

A great hawk had fallen over the house—even Clifford's incessant movement from drawing-room and dining-room to garden, and back again, was not heard, and not a sound from the rooms upstairs. The bird in the cage had ceased its song, and stood drooping on its perch; and without the evening had fallen so still and brooding that scarcely a leaf stirred.

Mrs. Forster started as the glass door leading into the garden was opened gently, and then, in utter amazement, dropped the spoon she was using. A slender girl's form she could not mistake stood before her, and yet she thought her senses must have cheated her as she went towards her, holding out both her hands. The look on that young face went to her heart. The restrictions of rank were swept down, and the mistress clung to the servant.

She was a child quivering under the sorrow that was strange because so new; and the woman who held her so lovingly, her comforter by right of years and experience. It comforted could be given.

Christine lifted herself to whisper—

"Is he alive?"

"Yes, my dear, and thank Heaven, you are come. Let me take off your hat before you go up. I have but just sent Evans to meet you."

"I could not wait for the train—it was half-an-hour. I had a special, and the station-master drove me over. Where have you been?"

"Where is the master? In your own old room—because, you see, I always kept that ready in case either of you came back suddenly. And let's us have having this dressing-room near. Shall I tell Mrs. Clifford you're come?"

Christine's pale face changed colour.

"No," she said. "I will go to him presently. I'll go up now. Mrs. Forster?" Her soft young lips pressed the old housekeeper's cheek gratefully, and she went out past the drawing-room door, and up the wide stairway, shadowy lit by the gleamings of no one had thought to light the gas. It was all so familiar, as if she had never left it.

Oh, if she never had! She went softly into the room, clearing the door noiselessly, but Coffin heard the sound she had been sitting erect for minutes before, and as she entered came up to her, not holistically as usual, but slowly waving his hand and pushing his nose into her hand. His delight was only expressed through the medium of his loving eyes. It was not dark here—no shadows, all the clear amber light of an autumn sunset filling the room. But how still—how deathly still! Silently Christine met Dr. Hall, who had risen, as he saw her, and gave this her hand without a word—nay, with her eyes turned towards the bed. He only pressed her hand, experienced enough to see that a word just now was more than she could bear. Then she went to the bedside.

Such a mere girl to look as if her heart were breaking, and yet to be so painfully quiet—to put back the loose waves of golden hair with touch so tenderly tender, to lay such trembling lips on the white brow, and yet to shed no tear and speak no word! She seemed as if she could not leave him—as if she had recovered some treasure, and to get from it

would be giving up life. Had she, then, forgotten her wrongs—forgotten that she had said forgiveness would be shame? Was he again exalted into the hero he had been to her once just because he lay dying? No, memory was only too keen and clear—but washed pure of all bitterness; nor was he a hero—only the man she loved, who needed her, who might never again by word or look bridge over the space between them. To die so—to leave her not one tender thought of him. She looked up to the physician with a question that spoke plain without words. His face answered her, and she beat down again this time with whispered words she could not control—"Oh Heaven, don't take him from me—not like this! Give us a little more time—to be happy a little while!"

She raised herself suddenly, and in an instant had forced herself into a calmer manner. She listened while Dr. Hall explained to her the injury, and the almost entire absence of ground for hope—the loss of blood alone, he said, had been enough to kill a man with less vitality. She noticed that he made no arrangements as to further advice or assistance—never asked her as to her nursing capabilities, and drew her own mournful conclusions. She could ask him without a falter how many hours he gave for him to run out, could hear in the answer his answer: "I fear not beyond the morning." And he will never wake—never blow out?" she said.

"I can't be sure—if he does probably it will be only just before death. But he is in Heaven's hands."

"Yes," said Christine, mechanically. She had not lost her faith—she knew the words to be sincerely said, but her heart was pained—the full sweetness those words contained had not penetrated it. She sat down by the bedside, refusing to take food. It might be a long watch, the doctor said. "Presently," she answered, gently, "I can't now," and added, with an effort to smile, "I shall be stronger soon—I suppose the telegram shocked me, and seeing Albert."

She rested her head against the pillow, and the darkness began to settle down on the room. Then Mrs. Forster came quietly in, lighted the wax tapers, lowered the blinds, and going out, returned immediately, carrying a cup of tea to her mistress. Christine never knew how she swallowed it, but when the task was got through she could feel its effects. She learned that Fanny, who was to follow her, had already arrived, and that Mr. Clifford had asked if she (Christine) had come. Dr. Hall had left the room with the housekeeper to take some refreshment, and Christine was alone, save for the dog, who could not be got to stir.

She grew strangely strong in that half world watch, which Death seemed to share with her like another personality. She heard hoarse sounds, like some wayward stealthy footsteps past the door, or a faint ring of a bell below, or the voice in low tones—but she lived in another world. Nothing had any reality but the motionless form beside her—no sound was so distinct as the footfall that drew nearer and nearer, and how you could

Dr. Hall came back, looked at his patient, and told Christine that her brother was anxious to see her, but she shook her head. "Not now," she said, and the doctor took up his old place. She could not tear herself away—some irresistible attraction would have drawn her feet back. No matter what Pelham thought—the selfish, had forgotten that there breathed any but one being in the whole world.

The time slipped by—the hours grew still, as all nature or two were up to bed. Once or twice Dr. Hall came again if the wounded man had any power or was capable of resistance; once, by his order, Christine made the effort. She had always attended the servants when they were ill, and told her companions she had been in the habit of nursing her sick schoolfellows in Germany, and on bed and bath and

He answered, smiling, he knew this was not







["THERE IS NO MORE I CAN SUFFER!" CRIED CHRISTINE. "YOU—YOU—I LOVED YOU SO!"]

"Christine, you despise me so much? I am not the first man whom love has led away. Have some pity; don't forsake me utterly because I have failed! Don't judge me by your purity of soul!"

"I am not judging you, nor despising you; I only feel as if love, and trust, and honour had no meaning. I think they have none for me."

"Christine! Christine! a word like that from you!" said Pelham, turning aside. "But it is my own wretched fault. Well, I will tell you the rest, it is your right. I met Delmar just in the lane that passes the gates to the station—I was going to the train, I suppose he had come from it."

"Yes," she interrupted; "he had been to town to try and find me out. Maddie had seen him."

"Maddie!" said Pelham, hotly. "He saw her?"

She flushed up haughtily.

"Let it pass. Go on!" she said.

"I thought he would pass me, as I meant to do by him; but what you say accounts for his action. He threw himself off his horse—I stopped."

He paused. Christine did not move, save to utter the words,—

"What then?"

Pelham took up the tale again, as a child repeats a hard and hated task. Christine had difficulty at times in hearing all he said.

"I scarcely know what passed—I could not tell at first why he stopped me at all; then I knew."

"How? What did he say?"

"He said I had come between you two, that I was keeping you from him. Then he struck me with the whip he held—I think he hardly knew what he did—and the blow maddened me; then I fired! Christine, I swear to you before Heaven I did not mean to kill him! I was mad—mad!"

Her head sank hopelessly on her folded arms

—she gave no other sign; and he dared not comfort her—he bloodstained with the blood that was dear to her!

It was minutes before she moved. She looked as if months of illness had weighed her down; but what pathetic beauty was in that young face! She spoke feebly, dropping her words out.

"What did he mean by coming between us? You must have mistaken; he must have meant Maddie."

"No, he meant you, and he must have heard about it from her."

"About what?"

"He wrote to you," began Pelham, hesitatingly.

He might well hesitate. She was like another being as she flung back the short curls from her forehead, with a sparkle in her eye, and a burning cheek.

"How do you know? How did Maddie know? She told me yesterday. Where are the letters? There were two!" she said, fiercely.

"Christine, it was for you. Have you forgotten all he has done? I had your wrongs to think of, and yours were mine. I have not read them; but I could not let you go back to him, to suffer again."

She stood there like a beautiful hunted creature with blazing eyes, grasping the back of her chair with shaking hand.

"I am his, not yours; my wrongs are my own, not yours!" she said. "You have come between us—you have taken him from me. Who gave you the right to judge him—to dictate to me—to say he should never be pardoned? No; give your action the right name. Say it was not love for me, but fear lest, going back to him, I should discover this truth you have hidden by flinging the falsehood to him! Those letters! Oh, if I had had them all this might never have been!"

Her passion wavered, changed; she flung herself on her knees by the table, breaking down into dreadful sobs.

"You, who loved me, have wronged me more deeply than he who never loved me; and now he never will. He will never know how I could have forgiven! Oh, Albert, husband, take me with you; I am so awfully alone!"

And her brother dared not even so much as touch her. He was appalled by those racking sobs; yet he stood silent, helpless.

She got upressently, exhausted and drooping.

"Go back to Maddie," she said, "and send me those letters. Come back again as soon as you can."

She turned to the door. He stretched out his hands to her.

"Christine, is this to be the end?"

She looked down earnestly at those white, shapely hands—had he ever needed before to plead to her like this?—looked as if she saw blood on them. She shuddered from head to foot.

"Let me go," she said, scarcely articulately.

"I can bear no more!"

Silently he opened the door. She saw him turn back into the room, and, throwing himself again on the couch, bury his face in the cushions. One second she lingered, looking at him, then closed the door softly, and flitted upstairs, more like the shadow of herself than the bright girl who had trod them first a year ago.

There seemed but one place for her now—just for one minute to steady herself before she went back to the sick-room—crouching before the crucifix that had so often looked down on her grief, so seldom on her joy; but there had been no grief like this.

She could not pray—it was all such confusion, such darkness; but a thought grew out of the stillness that calmed her—that One trod beside her this weary, tangled path.

(To be continued.)

Every man is not so much a workman in the world as he is a suggestion of what he should be. Men walk as prophecies of the next age.





[SHE HAD NOT GONE FAR WHEN A HAND WAS LAID ON HER SHOULDER, AND SHE FOUND HERSELF FACE TO FACE WITH GUY.]

NOVELLETTE.]

## MURIEL'S HEARTACHE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### INTRODUCES OUR HEROINE.

SOMEWHERE in a quiet south-eastern suburb, equally removed from the open breezes of Blackheath and the leather-smelling regions of Bermondsey, there stands a long, irregular, winding road of semi-detached houses whose builder had doubtless an eye for ingenuity, since each pair was built on the precise model of the pair in front of it.

Elysian-road, Hurst Green, was the name of this triumph of suburban art, and surely no name was ever more unsuitable; the very word Elysian means happiness, splendour, prosperity. Now in Elysian-road, Hurst Green, we must state emphatically there was no prosperity, no splendour, and only such an amount of happiness as is compatible with strictly limited means.

No one in Elysian-road was rich; it was called in advertisements a "rising neighbourhood;" but however much the neighbourhood might rise it is quite certain its inhabitants did not. They were struggling when they came there, and if any end came to their struggles it was mostly that their affairs grew so desperate struggling became unavailing, and so they ceased their efforts.

Upon the gate of one of the houses in Elysian-road appeared a large brass plate, imposingly inscribed Percival Yorke, B.A., Classical Tutor. Perhaps the neighbourhood was not famed for its classic tastes, and so the plate remained disregarded, and the people who rejected the offer of Mr. Yorke's instruction troubled themselves little of how that worthy man was to keep his head above water without the aid of his pupils and their fees. It was not his own head either that was alone to be kept above water; there were

sundry other heads depending on his efforts, and one of these heads appeared at the window one bright December afternoon with a strangely troubled face, as she looked out upon the dull monotonous road in which the larger half of her young life had been passed.

Her name was Muriel, and she was nineteen. She had never been to a party in her life; she was more familiar with bills than bank-notes; knew the value of shillings better than sovereigns, and yet she was a lady. There was a nameless something in the slight, wistful face which told that, despite her shabby dress, Percival Yorke's daughter came of gentle blood. She wore a blue serge dress faded by two winters' wear, and darned in several places; it was not even fastened by a brooch or knot of ribbons, but her hair was golden brown, just the tint that the sun lights up, and her eyes were deep, dark blue, with long brown lashes; her hands were small and delicate, her mouth red and kissable, though just now it was decidedly pouting.

"If only something would happen," sighed the girl, half aloud; "if only we could have something to look at but the opposite chimney pots; if only the postman would bring us something better than bills, what a good thing it would be!"

A young man stopped at the gate, and ran quickly up the steps. Muriel nodded to him as carelessly as though he had been her brother. She had known him for a great many of her nineteen years, and was most perfectly at her ease with him.

"Dick!"

"How cosy you look!" and his eyes wandered admiringly to her face. "Why, Muriel, your fire is something to be grateful for such a bitter day!"

He stood warming his hands meditatively, but Muriel Yorke had nothing of meditation in her character.

"Well," she said, sharply.

Dick Greville was not a shy man, but yet

he hesitated. In all the world there was but one woman for him—the one who stood beside him in the firelight; he longed to tell her his news, to ask her to share the prosperity which had come to him, and yet he hesitated.

He was such a rough, blundering fellow, he thought, and she such a fairy creature. Could it be possible that she would ever care for him! He had worshipped her ever since he knew her first—a little maiden in short frocks and pinafores—but never through all those years had he felt sure she cared for him save as a friend.

Suddenly the girl's face softened; she put one hand on his arm almost caressingly.

"You have failed," she said, gently, "and you don't like to say so. Why, Dick, you are a great deal nicer to me if you have failed; it puts us more on an equality. Everything fails here, you know, from Martha's puddings to dad's advertisements. Cheer up, you will have better luck next time."

"I have not failed," he said, at last, slowly.

"I have got it, Muriel."

"You have got it?" she almost gasped.

"Yes!"

"And it is just what the advertisement said, three hundred a-year and a house to live in?"

"It is better than the advertisement said; the house is the sweetest little place you ever saw, and furnished from top to toe."

"Then why do you look so fearfully solemn? I declare, Dick, when you came in failure was written on your every feature."

"I daresay."

"I don't understand," said Muriel, petulantly. "You wanted the appointment, didn't you?"

"I wanted it dreadfully."

"Isn't Lord Alwyn a nice man? Didn't he treat you as an equal?"

"He was awfully nice. I found I had known him years ago, before he ever came into the title."

Muriel made him a mock courtesy.  
"Bosom friend to a lord! O, Dick, how we shall have to respect you. But why aren't you elated? You look as if you had picked up sixpence and lost half-a-crown."

"Muriel, do be serious."  
A strange light came into her blue eyes.  
"I am always serious, Dick. It's one of the habits one gains by a residence in Elystan-road."

"Muriel, shouldn't you like to leave Elystan-road?"

She clasped her two hands, and looked straight into his face, not a suspicion of his meaning had come to her.

"I should like it most awfully, Dick."  
"Then will you—can you—may I speak to Mr. Yorke?"

The girl looked at him in amazement.

"I don't understand. What do you mean, Dick? I think your good fortune has turned your brain. What good would it be for you to speak to papa? Dear old dad knows quite well I want to leave Elystan-road; he rather shares the wish himself, but there are reasons; in plain English, we can't afford it."

"You don't understand, Muriel," said the young man, fondly. "I want you to come to me—to be my wife, darling. I have loved you ever since I knew you."

"I was a horrid little girl, Dick."

"You were never horrid in your life, Darling. I am waiting for your answer."

"I can't, Dick," and the tears welled up into her blue eyes. "Dear, I wish you hadn't thought of it."

"Could I know you and not think of it? Oh, Muriel, don't you think you could ever get to care for me. Oh, my darling, I would wait so patiently; I would serve for you as Jacob served for Rachel if only you would be mine at last."

The girl shook her head.  
"I don't love you, dear," she said, simply.  
"I'm sure I wish I did, but I think I must have a very hard heart, for I don't love anyone particularly, except dad and mother and the boys."

"But if you don't love anyone else," suggested Dick, hopefully, "surely in time you might learn to care for me? I would wait so patiently, Muriel."

"I don't think love ever comes like that, Dick; at least it wouldn't to me. If I ever love anyone I shall do it suddenly. I shall wake up some day and find I have given my heart away. I couldn't love anyone just by trying to."

"Muriel," his voice was full of passion. "Think of the years I have hoped for you."

"But I don't love you, Dick."

"I had rather have you even so," he answered. "I am quite content to risk it."

Love like mine must wait a return at last."

Muriel's tears were falling fast.

"I can't, Dick," she said, simply. "I don't believe in the love that comes just from gratitude. I should end by hating you just by trying to love you."

Dick Greville stood gazing into the fire. His dearest hopes were blighted. What mattered it now that he was Lord Alwyn's agent and manager—that he had a pretty, useful home? What place could be home to him without Muriel? He started at last to see that she was crying.

"Don't, dear," he said, huskily. "I can't bear to see you! It's all my fault, Muriel! I ought to have known you were too fair and pretty to care for a big, blundering fellow like me!"

"I feel so wicked!" sobbed the girl. "You have given me everything! Oh, Dick! I must have a very hard heart not to love you!"

There were signs of footsteps overhead. Dick came the door close to Muriel, and whispered,—

"Promises me one thing if you shall ever change; if ever you would give me an answer, let me know."

"I promise."

He stood with his hand in hers, looking down into her dark blue eyes. Suddenly he stooped and pressed his lips passionately to her forehead.

"Heaven bless you, Muriel!" he murmured, fervently, and then he was gone.

A minute later, when Mrs. Yorke came in, her daughter was alone—a strangely grave expression on her pretty face. It was Muriel's very first experience of love and lovers, and she had not enjoyed it. There was no pride or exultation at her heart—nothing but a blank, cold regret. She had lost her steady, honest friend, and gained nothing in exchange. And I thought love made people so happy," murmured the girl to herself.

"Think, Muriel!" said her mother, presently. "Whatever else might be lacking in this particular part of Elystan-road there was no dearth of family affection. Harsh words and angry looks were almost unknown among the Yokes."

"Yes, mamma."

"I thought I heard Dick's knock."

"Yes. He came to tell me he had got that appointment to Blankshire."

"Good! Why, the fortune is made! How sorry you speak about it, Muriel."

"I think I am crying him a little. Mother, dear, I wish you would let me go out into the world and earn my own living! I feel sometimes as if I were tired to death of Elystan-road!"

"It is your home, Muriel."

"I am not tired of you!"—kissing her—"but, oh, mamma, I am sixteen, and I have never seen five minutes from Hurst Green in my life!"

"Not since you can remember," corrected her mother. "You were born in the country."

"Was I really?"

"Yes; in the spring time, when the hedges were full of blossoms. To that you owe your second name. I was young and romantic then, Muriel. I thought not one of the May flowers was so sweet as my little daughter!"

Mother and child were interrupted. The postman had mounted the steps, and now gave his loud rat-tat-tat at the hall door.

Mrs. Yorke and her daughter started. The summons had no pleasurable sound for them. Their correspondents were mostly creditors. Already vicious old tax-payers troubled Muriel, and when the small, red-armed handmaid brought in the mail, she took it as casually as though she expected it to contain a cheque.

But one glance relieved her. The envelope bore a crest and monogram. It was directed in a clear, free, running hand. Such writing could not belong to a creditor. It was her own.

"Open it, quickly, mamma; I am all curiosity!"

But Mrs. Yorke's fingers trembled, so it was long before she could obey, and then she was so slow in reading the message that her daughter grew impatient.

"Who is it from, mamma?"

Mrs. Yorke answered slowly; almost at a thought she was trying to recall a memory of the past.

"An old, old friend of mine, Muriel, Rosalie Norton. You have heard me speak of her."

"She was your dearest friend, wasn't she, mamma?"

"Yes. For some years after my marriage she corresponded; but she travelled a great deal, and so our letters ceased. It must be ten or twelve years since I heard from her."

"And why does she write now?"

"It seems she saw one of your father's advertisements, and thought it must be my husband's."

"The only good those advertisements ever did us," muttered Muriel, rebelliously. "Well, mother, what does Mrs. Norton say after her twelve years' silence?"

"You had better read it, Muriel."

The letter was very simple. Affection beamed in every line. The writer expressed

great pleasure at again discovering Mrs. Yorke's address, and begged, as a personal favour, that her old friend would spare her goddaughter to spend a few weeks with her. "She is just the age of my Isabel," concluded Mrs. Norton. "I should like an old friendship to be renewed in our children. I will promise to take the greatest care of Muriel if you will lend her to us."

Muriel laid the letter down, with a little sigh.

"How I wish I could go!"

Mrs. Yorke looked thoughtful.  
"I wish you could. I must speak to your father about it. Rosalie Norton is the person in all the world with whom I would sooner trust you."

"But we've no money," said Muriel, bluntly; "and I should want a lot of things besides my carriage fare. No mother, we must give it up!"

Perhaps Mrs. Norton, reading between the lines of her old friend's letter, in answer to the invitation, guessed a little of the bitter poverty to which her school fellow had been reduced; for she wrote again, delicately reminding her that Muriel was her godchild, a long stream of birthday presents weighed upon her mind, and so she enclosed a cheque for the young lady to select them herself, hoping that even yet she might change her mind, and spend Christmas at Allerton.

The most sensitive person could not have been offended. There was a little consolation, and then it was decided Muriel was to go, a week or so of pleasant preparation, and then, every arrangement having been made, Mr. Yorke took his daughter to the Victoria terminus, and solemnly entrusted her to the care of the guard.

A pretty picture she formed on that bright winter's morning. A soft grey cashmere replacing the well-worn serge, a tightly fitting cloth jacket, long gloves and velvet hat, completed the costume; and never since she could remember had Muriel Yorke been so expensively dressed.

The father had departed, the train was on the point of starting, when a late comer appeared, and was bundled unceremoniously into Muriel's carriage—a young man of eight or nine and twenty, with a handsome face, spoilt by a wavering expression and a strange sinister look in his light eyes.

Muriel knew little of the world, and yet one glance at this stranger told her he was unworthy either trust or confidence. He was well-dressed, he had the bearing of a gentleman, and yet the girl shrank back in her corner with a strange sense of fear—a presentiment, perhaps, of the cruel sorrow, the bitter heartache, which was to come to her through this man, whose very name she did not know.

He looked at her steadily, and after a few moments' scrutiny, tried to enter into conversation.

"You are going to Allerton," reading the address off one of her little packages. "It's a pretty place. Have you ever been there before?"

"Never."

She made her answer as short as possible; she would willingly not have replied, only it seemed so rude.

"I thought perhaps you were a friend or schoolfellow of the heiress."

"I have never seen anyone at Allerton."

"It's not a large place," he condescended to inform her. "No house of note in it except the Castle. You are going to the Castle, of course."

"I am going to Mrs. Norton."

"That means the Castle. Mrs. Norton is saying there as mistakes for the time being; she and her incomparable nephew are on the best of terms."

Muriel gathered her courage.

"I think I had rather you did not talk to me about them," she said timidly. "Mrs. Norton has been very kind to me, and—"

"What a good little girl!"—there was a sneer on his face;—"poor Isabel, it is doubtless



for her benefit; this paragon has been invited. Poor villain, a pious mother and priggish cousin are not sufficient monitors apparently.

Muriel was silent; there was something in the man's face, which frightened her. They had just reached a large junction, and it was with great relief that she saw him get out and stroll leisurely towards the refreshment-rooms. Muriel seriously thought of removing herself and her belongings to another carriage before he returned, but she was an inexperienced traveller, and so she gave up the idea. She took a little book from her parcels and was trying to read it, when the door was opened, and someone entered. At first she supposed it to be her objectionable fellow-traveller, but as the train moved slowly from the platform she saw her mistake. Her original neighbour was rushing violently towards the carriage till stopped by a station-porter, and the person opposite her was watching his efforts with a kind of amused approval.

He was a tall, soldierly man, very different from his predecessor. He could hardly have been twenty years the senior, and he was quite as much a stranger to Muriel as her late companion, and yet the girl contemplated his presence with perfect composure and even a certain amount of relief. He had one of those faces women trust in all emergencies. Muriel's neighbour turned to her abruptly.

"I hope you have not lost your escort; he seemed to be making for this carriage."

"Oh no," said the girl, simply. "I never saw him before in my life."

"And if you never see him again it will be a good thing. He is no fit companion for a young lady."

Muriel blushed.

"I hope he has not annoyed you?"

"I am very foolish," the tears actually stood in her blue eyes; "but I never went anywhere alone before, and I think he frightened me."

"Be easy," returned the stranger; "he must wait a minute for the next train, and by that time we shall be beyond pursuit. Am I to have the pleasure of your company for?"

"I am going to Allerton," Muriel said.

"So what?" returned Muriel with a little emphasis on the "what." "And, oh, he said such dreadful things about me!"

"The gentleman laughed; he really could not help it."

"In Allerton's name I assure you they were unfounded; it is one of the prettiest villages in Berkshire, and so small that a stranger is quite an event."

"Am I to go often to a strange place?"

"On various occasions; a stranger coming to the side is quite another thing. The whole place goes into a commotion."

"It must be a hospitable place."

"I hope so," Muriel said.

"Do you live there?"

"I should come over his foot."

"I never live anywhere, I travel about."

"How very nice!"

"Nice! To have no settled home. You call that nice?"

"Oh, course I do. Why I have lived in one house ever since I can remember, and you can't think how tired I am of it."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It is always the same."

"But you go away for a change."

"She shook her head."

"We can't afford it. I am going on a visit now, the very first since I can remember."

"I hope you will enjoy it?"

He looked earnestly at the girl, flushed face, and added to himself, "And reflect the sweet, unadorned child you are now."

The train stopped at Allerton, and the porter said, "Do you expect anyone to meet you?"

"I think Mrs. Norton will have sent me some message she would."

A young lady stepped on the platform, a tiny fairy creature, with a profusion of flaxen hair and light gray eyes. She was very pretty, but there was no soul or character on her face;

her features were more regular than Muriel's, but she lacked the expression, the intellect stamped on our heroine's white brow. She went straight up to Miss Yorke and kissed her prettily on either cheek.

"I am quite sure you are Muriel. I hope we shall be great friends."

Muriel echoed the wish. She thought she could be very fond of this slight, fairylike creature, who looked so childish in her velvet costume trimmed with fur. She was following Isabel to the carriage, when her late companion came up and took Miss Norton's hand.

"How are you, child?"

"Quite well, Guy."

"Drive me home. I see they haven't brought the dog with them."

He handed the two girls into the brougham, piled the soft rugs over them both, and seated himself opposite. Isabel's eyes were still wandering to the platform.

"How very few people come by this train!" she said, as they drove off.

"Very few," returned Muriel; "one of the passengers got left behind, though!"

"Who was it?"

"No one we need regret, Belle," chimed in their escort.

"Ogil Lenson. I can't think what he wanted in these parts."

Was it a fancy, or did the colour deepen on Miss Norton's pretty face? Devoutly Muriel hoped it was fancy; she was thinking of the man's words. Of course Belle was the heiress of whom he had spoken so familiarly, and could it be that the gentleman opposite was her "priggish cousin?"

He looked to Muriel's eyes more like a knight of olden days than a pig. He looked up suddenly.

"Belle, you are strangely ignorant of your social duties. Why don't you introduce me to your friend, pray?"

"I thought you knew her; you travelled together."

"But we haven't been introduced. Now, my dear child, perform your duty prettily!"

"This is my cousin Guy," returned Belle, smiling.

Muriel wondered a little if she was to address him as "Isabel's cousin Guy," but he seemed to the matter to fight her out.

"I am Guy Algernon Norton, at your service, Miss Yorke," he said, simply, and in a matter-of-fact tone.

They were at the entrance now. Muriel gave a little gasp. Footmen were gathered in the hall, a stately butler came forward to lead the way to the drawing-room; and there a pretty graceful woman in mourning, with eyes like Isabel's, only with more heart in them, came forward and took the shy, timid girl in her arms.

"I am so glad to have you, dear! Now you must get to your room. We dine at seven."

Herself she took Muriel up stairs to a pretty bedroom hung with blue satin; she seated her by the bright wood fire, and began unfastening her wraps.

"We are quite alone now," she said, kindly; "but a great many people are coming next week. I thought Guy would like us to have a few days' quiet."

Muriel looked bewildered, and the lady hastily explained.

"My nephew, Lord Alwyn, is engaged to Isabel. You see I tell you all our secrets, Muriel."

She went away, promising to send a maid to assist Miss Yorke, but Muriel went back on a chair to recover from her surprise. She had only been ten minutes at the Castle and had made two discoveries.

"Guy" was Dick Greyville's patron; and we fear that was not quite agreeable to Muriel.

She was to marry Isabel!

## CHAPTER II.

### A HAPPY LOVE.

Left alone, Muriel Yorke sat by the pleasant wood fire, still lost in bewilderment.

She had come to Allerton, thinking of but little save the pleasure she expected—with no graver dreams than those of Christmas festivities. She had not been there half an hour, and it seemed to her already there was some strange shadow over the place. Its master was to marry Isabel, and yet the pretty, fairy-like heiress seemed to have but little love for him. An uneasy conviction forced itself on Muriel that her disagreeable fellow-traveller held some interest in Isabel's heart, and Cyril Lenson was destined to disturb Lord Alwyn's peace of mind.

"But yet she couldn't look at him after the Earl," thought the girl, suddenly. "She couldn't care for anyone else since she is to be Lord Alwyn's wife. It must be a fancy of mine."

A maid came in now to dress Miss Yorke. It was passing strange to the little visitor from Elysian-road to be decked by any other hands than her own. She stood a good deal in awe of the tall, fashionably-dressed damsel who made herself so very busy with her trunks. But she need not have been; the servant knew a lady when she saw one, and she waited on Muriel with as much respect as though she had been a duchess. She did her work silently and well—twining the soft, golden hair in coils round the graceful head, and choosing from among the few dresses Mrs. Yorke had bought for her daughter a long, flowing, white muslin, open to show the fair, white throat and rounded arms. She took some forget-me-nots from a vase on the table and fastened them in the golden hair; then she surveyed the effect, well pleased at her own success.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, miss?"

Muriel gave a little cry. She was standing in front of a long pier-glass, which reflected back her beauty. Never before had she known how very, very pretty she really was!

She had known, of course, that she was not plain—that her shabby clothes became her better than silks and satins, became far richer maidens; but never, until this December evening, had she known that she was beautiful.

"Is that really me?" she asked, half aloud, with a girlish disregard of grammar.

The maid smiled; she could not help it.

"Can you find your way to the drawing-room, miss?" she asked, good-naturedly.

Muriel said, "Yes," and went downstairs, but she soon wished she had secured Mary's guidance. The geography of the Castle was confusing. To a person used to an eight-roomed house six or seven doors on a floor, all precisely similar, are rather embarrassing. Miss Yorke made a frantic rush at the one nearest her, and then discovered she had made a mistake.

The room she had entered was evidently a study. It was lighted only by the flickering firelight, but she could see that the walls were lined with books.

Someone, who had been sitting near the fire, came forward. Muriel gave a little start as she recognised the Earl.

"I—I beg your pardon," she said awkwardly; "I thought this was the drawing-room."

He smiled.

"Don't be afraid, Miss Yorke, this is my den, but it is not a Bluebeard's closet."

He placed her chair as he spoke, and she set down her blue eyes wandering round the room.

"Do you like it?"

"Like it!" she repeated, "it looks lovely. Why, Lord Alwyn, you must have more books than you can read!"

"I am fond of reading. When I am at the Castle I spend most of my time here."

"Alone?"

"Yes!"

He noticed the surprise written on her face.

"My aunt and Belle take care of each other; they are a most devoted pair."

It occurred to Muriel that if she had been engaged to Lord Alwyn she should not have

liked him to shut himself up in the library instead of seeking her society; and then she flushed rosy red that such an idea should have crossed her mind.

"Are you a great reader, Miss Yorke?"

She shook her head.

"I haven't much time for it."

"Not much time? Oh, you mean you are still at school?"

"I never went to school in my life!"

"Then you are still under the thralldom of a governess?"

"I never had a governess in my life!"

"You are mysterious," said the Earl, interested. "Are you one of the advanced people who doubt the benefits of education, and don't believe in reading and writing?"

She blushed hotly.

"I can read and write, of course, but I dare say I am not what people call educated. I have always been at home, and mother has taught me all I know."

"You are very like her."

Muriel opened her eyes.

"Did you really know mamma?"

"I know her intimately, long ago, when I was a young man."

"Aren't you young now?" asked Muriel, bluntly.

"No, I am getting a sober, middle-aged man."

Muriel looked at him wistfully.

"You don't look old?"

"I suppose we are all as old as we feel, and if that is so my youth went from me ten years ago."

The dinner bell rang out its summons; he offered his arm to Muriel, and led her to the drawing-room. Mrs. Norton was there with her daughter, and to Miss Yorke's amazement, Dick Greville. She had never seen him since the afternoon when he told her of his love, and neither of them had expected this meeting. The room seemed to swim round with Muriel; only as Mrs. Norton began a formal introduction, she said, simply,—

"You need not introduce us; I have known Dick nearly all my life."

Isabel and her mother looked surprised, but were too well-bred to express it. An elderly clergyman gave his arm to Mrs. Norton, Dick offered his to Belle, and the Earl followed with Muriel.

"And so you know my friend Greville," he said, in an under tone. "You can't think how glad I was to see him the other day; we had not met for years."

"I think it was Dick who was glad; he was delighted to come to Allerton."

And then, remembering whom he had wished to take with him to Allerton, Miss Yorke blushed.

Guy watched her keenly; he had very little faith in women. Years before, when his wealth and honours were yet to come, he had been cruelly jilted; he had never trusted a woman since, and yet there was a simple truth shining in Muriel's blue eyes which almost conquered his doubts.

"You are very intimate with Greville?"

"Oh, yes, we are old friends."

"Like brother and sister, I suppose?"

"Yes."

He smiled.

"Then I must get you to help me in a little scheme for Dick's benefit."

"I would do anything for Dick."

"I will tell it you by-and-by."

Dinner was a pleasant meal enough. When the ladies retired to the drawing-room Mrs. Norton indulged in a nap, and the two girls seated themselves on a low couch by the fire.

It was just the hour for making confidences, each felt strangely attracted towards the other, and yet for a long time neither spoke.

"What do you think of Guy?"

The question was so abrupt, for a moment Muriel could hardly answer; at last she said, slowly,—

"He is very handsome."

"Oh, yes, and very good, honourable, generous, just, and true," ticking his virtues off

on the fingers of her hand. "Mamma tells me his perfections a dozen times a day; everyone says he is as faultless as a man can be; and then he is master of the Castle, he has an ancient title, an ample fortune, and splendid family diamonds. Of course, I shall be very happy."

There was something so bitter in her tone that Muriel said quickly,—

"I hope you will; you don't look fit for anything but happiness."

"I have had my own way all my life. Mamma lost all her other children, and she was always afraid of losing me, so I have been terribly spoiled till now."

"And now the spoiling will go on just the same," said Muriel, cheerfully, "only it will be Lord Alwyn who does it instead of Mrs. Norton."

Isabel shook her head.

"Guy doesn't care for me, he is so cold and stern, he seems sometimes to freeze me by a look."

"He must love you, or he wouldn't wish to marry you."

"Love me! Guy doesn't know the meaning of the word. He did love someone once, but it was years and years ago, when I was a little child; he has never cared for anyone since. When my grandfather was dying it troubled him very much that the estates should be divided, some coming to me and some to Guy, and at last he hit upon the plan of our being married."

"And you consented?"

"They never asked me! I was a little girl of ten, and Guy was just as he is now—sterner if anything. I remember we both stood round grandpa's bed, and he kissed me and told Guy to take care of me."

"It sounds like a royal betrothal."

"It was very horrid. Since that mamma has always treated Guy as if I belonged to him, and consulted him about everything."

"And when are you to be married?"

Isabel shivered.

"In the spring. Oh! Muriel, fancy what it will be; he will make me do just as he likes!"

"He seems so fond of you!"

"Fond of me! Guy isn't fond of anyone; he treats me much as he does his pet spaniel."

Muriel understood this speech when Lord Alwyn entered; he came up to his cousin and spoke to her just as he might have spoken to a pet child.

"Go and sing something, Belle."

"I don't feel inclined!"

"Nonsense," then as she moved to the piano he seated himself by Muriel.

"Greville has gone home."

"Has he!"

"Why did you deceive me just now?"

"I didn't."

"You told me you and he were old friends."

"And so we are!"

"Then explain me this. He came up to the Castle to dine and sleep; he declared he should enjoy a social evening with us; he sees you and forthwith he finds he has so much to do he must get home at once."

Muriel's eyes filled.

"I am so sorry. I wish I hadn't come."

"How polite to us! Well!"

"What was your scheme for pleasing Dick?"

"I don't think I shall tell you. Won't you make me your father-confessor, Miss Yorke? Why did Dick Greville want to go home directly he saw you?"

"I suppose he doesn't care to be where I am."

"Why should he object?"

"I can't tell you!"

"Can't or won't? I wish you had seen Dick when he first came here about the appointment; he was as happy and light-hearted as a child. If the house, which goes with the post, had been a palace, he couldn't have gloried in it more."

Mrs. Norton slumbered on. Belle was playing a noisy march, and Guy looking at Muriel's face saw the tears stealing down her cheeks.

"Well! in one little week he came back,

sober, grave and troubled. If he had been away seven years instead of seven days he couldn't have been more altered."

"Don't," whispered Muriel, "please don't." "Your conscience pricks you; he is such a good fellow, Miss Yorke."

"I know. I like Dick better than anyone in the world except my own people."

"And yet you won't make him happy!"

"I can't."

"You think riches and position worth more than honest love."

Muriel's eyes flashed on him scornfully.

"I think love stronger than anything. I think if two people love each other they would be happy without a penny."

Guy smiled.

"Dick has a great many pennies."

"I said if two people loved each other!"

"Honest regard is worth all the madness people call love, Miss Yorke."

"Is it? I thought just now you were preaching against marrying without love?"

"I was preaching, as you call it, against breaking an honest man's heart—for men have hearts, Miss Yorke, though women don't think so."

"Poor women!" said Muriel, slowly. "I think you are harder on them than they deserve."

Isabel's march came to an abrupt ending and she left the piano.

"Do sing something, Muriel! I'm sure you can."

The tutor's daughter was not versed in fashionable excuses; she sat down at once and sang "Auld Robin Gray," sang it with a pathos and expression which brought tears to Mrs. Norton's eyes; she sang song after song, and when she had finished Guy thanked her, with a strange, new kindness in his voice.

The first day or two of Muriel's visit passed off pleasantly enough. Isabel conceived an ardent friendship for her, Mrs. Norton pestered her; but the master of the house, after that first evening, almost ignored her presence; save for the barest passing courtesy he never spoke to her. Perhaps he was vexed at his failure in pleading his friend's cause; perhaps he was jealous of his betrothed's affection for Muriel. Certainly she would have been dull enough at the Castle had she depended on her host for conversation.

And yet he always seemed, in a measure, to take note of what she did. Mrs. Norton made her sing every evening; and no matter where Guy was when she began, before the first song was ended he was seen to have joined them in the drawing-room. For the rest he spent most of his time shut up in the library, and his future wife never seemed to resent the scant attention she received at his hands.

"This is our last evening of comfort," said Lord Alwyn, one night about a week after Muriel's arrival; "to-morrow all the world and his wife will be upon us."

"Yes," said Belle, eagerly, "the Castle will be full of guests; we are to have balls, parties, charades and tableaux; it will be delightful!"

Her lover looked at her sharply.

"Don't you know, Belle, that people in our position are not supposed to require any society but our own. When you are Lady Alwyn it will be quite proper for you to exult in the arrival of a lot of strangers, but at present it is bad form."

He spoke sarcastically, anyone could see that, but Belle seemed upset. Her voice faltered:

"Don't be unkind, Guy!"

"My dear child! I am I ever unkind to you?"

"No, you don't take the trouble!"

"What do you mean, Isabel?"

"You accept me just like a piece of furniture bequeathed to you for your house. I believe you look on me as a chair or a table."

"I don't. You are much too pretty for either. I can't pay you compliments, child, it is not in my line; you must excuse it."

She looked a very child that night in a soft pink dress, which set off her fair skin and flaxen hair—more of a wax doll than ever was she in this toilet. Lord Alwyn looked from her,



to Muriel Yorke in her simple muslin, and wondered what was the difference between the two! It always seemed to him his cousin Isabel was like Undine before she found her soul.

"If only she loved me," he thought, a little reproachfully, "we might have a better chance of happiness; but I don't believe Belle has an idea what love is. Poor little Belle, she is very sweet and innocent. I can fearlessly trust my honour in her hands, after all, when most women are false, deceitful creatures. I ought to be glad to have a wife chosen for me so sweet, and pure, and innocent."

The following day the guests arrived. They were numerous, and of all kinds and styles—stately matrons, bewitching widows, husbands and wives, young men and maidens, all were represented. Lord Alwyn threw aside his indolence then and showed himself at his best, a courtly chivalrous host—a man whom women praised and men admired. Muriel Yorke, looking on, thought he seemed a very knight of olden days—and he was to marry Belle.

Christmas Eve came at last; the Castle had been decorated with holly and mistletoe, evergreens, and laurels. There were to be grand doings that night—*tableaux vivants*, followed by a carpet dance. Mrs. Norton, an excellent hostess, was in her element, and everything went merrily as a marriage bell.

The *tableaux* were a great success. They were all well known subjects; there was Isabel Norton as Cinderella, and again as the sleeping beauty. There was a pathetic blonde as Mary Stuart, and a lively widow as Beatrice; the attendant gentlemen on these heroines being enacted by the guests. Not until the last scene of all did Lord Alwyn appear, and then, singularly enough, he did not act with his betrothed, but with Muriel Yorke.

This was Belle's own doing; her name had been put down on the programme, but just as she ought to have been going to the temporary green-room, she sought out Muriel.

"I feel so faint," she whispered. "I know I shall be ill if I do not have a breath of fresh air. I am going into the grounds; do take my place."

"But the dress, but Lord Alwyn!" remonstrated Muriel.

"The dress is a loose white alk, it would fit anyone. Guy won't mind; you are one of his favourites."

The scene was that ever memorable one from the Huguenot lovers. When Guy entered the green-room to seek his fiancée he was astonished—the pretty childish girl had vanished. The heroine was a beautiful maiden with intensely earnest blue eyes, and a cloud of golden hair floating over her shoulders. Guy fancied it would have been hard to refuse a request from her.

"Where is Belle?"

"She is not well—she asked me to take her place. Do you mind, Lord Alwyn?"

The girl stood there in her unconscious beauty, simple and innocent as Isabel, and with one gift Isabel did not possess—a woman's soul shining in her eyes—a woman's intellect stamped on her youthful brow. Looking at her, the Earl of Alwyn woke to the knowledge of his own secret. He who had scoffed at love, whose faith in women had been so shaken that he had believed none could ever touch his heart again; and, secure in this belief, had let himself be betrothed to a pretty child nine years before to secure a family estate and satisfy an old man's scruples; he, I say, awoke to his own secret—he was in love.

Ever since the night he had pleaded his friend's cause with her, and she had told him love was stronger than aught on earth, he avoided Muriel pretty steadily, and yet he had never once been unconscious of her presence, had watched her smile, had listened to her voice; yet he had never suspected his own danger till now.

She stood before him, in her silken robes, the ribbons, which on the stage has to be offered him and refused in her hand, beautiful, earnest, and pleading, it came upon Lord

Alwyn, with terrible revelation that he loved her.

He knew little enough of her really, only she had everything which pleased his eye, everything which stirred his fancy. All that Belle lacked was perfected in her, and now she stood at his side to enact the part of his fiancée, and asked him if he "minded."

"Minded!" He would fain have made the exchange for ever, fain have broken the old lifeless compact, and taken Muriel to his very heart, but honour forbade. Guy knew one secret which he must keep to his dying day, only two other persons shared it—Mrs. Norton and the family lawyer.

By a fatal chance there was a flaw in the legality of Miss Norton's marriage, when she stood at the altar with the late Lord Alwyn's son—he already had a wife living. He never meant to injure his second bride, who was his heart's best choice; he firmly believed he was free from his miserable entanglement.

Alas! when the truth reached him it killed him slowly, but surely. He died, thankful that he left no son to inherit the misery of his mistake, with his last breath commending Isabel and her mother—whom he had privately remarried, to his father's care.

Lord Alwyn sent for his heir-at-law. Together they went over the deed of entail; there were undoubtedly several pieces of property Isabel could have inherited if legitimate, they must now be Guy's.

In vain the young man offered to waive his claims; in vain he protested he had never expected aught at his cousin's hands. Lord Alwyn was a just man, and one of sound judgment.

"We can't undo the past, and right poor Clare's child," he said simply; "if you waived your rights now one of your descendants might set an inkling of the truth a hundred years hence, and bring the whole thing to trial."

"I shall feel like a robber," said Guy, simply, "if I spoil the widow and orphan."

"You need do neither."

And then and there the famous plan was unfolded. Guy, still smarting from the rejection of his first love, believed that he should go through the world without caring for another woman. It would cost him nothing; it seemed the simplest justice to the child whose possessions by a strange chance he inherited.

They were engaged. The old Earl died; Isabel and her mother were installed at the Castle, and a liberal income allowed Mrs. Norton to keep it up. She herself possessed a modest jointure, but Isabel was absolutely portionless. Guy declared it mattered nothing, he would make a liberal settlement on his wife. He had a deep attachment for Mrs. Norton, whom he called auntie, although the tie between them was really that of distant cousinship.

He was such an honourable man, so simple and just in all his doings, that it never dawned on him that he was doing a very generous thing in accepting Isabel as his wife. He made so sure he should never love another woman that he never understood the magnitude of his sacrifice. It came upon him with a flash when he stood at Muriel Yorke's side, and he realized she was more to him than his pretty, childish betrothed could ever be.

"Do you mind?" she repeated, half frightened at his silence.

"Mind!" he steadied his voice by an effort. "No! he had better come at once, the audience will be waiting;" then, as he remembered the details of the scene they were to enact, he thought grimly there was a spice of bitter truth in it. Truly, though she knew it not, Muriel tempted him to dishonour; her beauty tempted him to fetter his religion, but his promise to a dead man and to a defenceless woman; every principal of honour bade him be faithful to Isabel, every instinct of his heart cried out that Muriel was his life's love, that he would not—could not give her up.

"Muriel!" he said, softly, as they stood together on the improvised stage, she with the fatal ribbon in her hand and that strange

pleading in her eyes, "I want to ask you something."

"Yes!" marvelling that he had used her name. "What is it, Lord Alwyn?"

"You told me once that love was stronger than aught else."

"Yes."

"If you had a lover—one who loved you as his own life and whom you loved back again, which would you prefer, his happiness or his honour?"

The girl never hesitated.

"His honour!" she answered, simply. "I don't think love could live without respect."

"You would rather see his grave, the grave of his happiness, than that he should break his word. Is that it, Muriel?"

"Yes."

The curtain went up; those in front declared this was the best of all the scenes they had had—the intense earnestness of Muriel Yorke as she knelt at Lord Alwyn's side trying to fasten the ribbon on his arm; the firm refusal gleaming in his eyes. They were a well-matched pair; the Earl was strikingly handsome despite his gravity, and Muriel had one of those faces so seldom seen which unite the earnestness of the woman with the innocence of the child.

Two of those who watched that scene had the same thought. As far as looks went, how suitable were these two to go through life's journey together!

"But I can trust Guy," thought the mother; "he is not the man to forsake my child. When he knows the shadow on her birth, even if he had no love for Isabel, his honour would compel him to give her his name."

"That is the man she might learn to love," decided Dick Greville, as he watched her; "if Guy had been free, and I must see my darling another's wife, I had rather give her to him than anyone in the world."

The curtain went down. Guy bent to raise Muriel, and then a strange thrill went through him. The hand he touched did not return his pressure, the blue eyes did not meet his, there was a shadow on their azure depths.

To see her shrink from him out him to the very heart he forgot everything then.

"What is it?" he cried, hoarsely. "Why won't you look at me, Muriel? What have I done?"

"It is nothing."

Guy placed her in a chair, and stood beside her; the startled tears were in her blue eyes. "Muriel, have I vexed you? Who has troubled you? Tell me."

There was a tone of authority in his voice, she could not resist. She turned to him with a little cry.

"It was Belle sent me. You need not have looked at me like that."

"How did I look, Muriel?"

"As if you despised me, as though you scorned me."

"Don't you know, dear," using the dear in all unconsciousness, "that look is in the scene; it was your ribbon I was scornful, not you. Muriel, I could not scorn you."

She raised her eyes to his, then they sank in confusion. Guy forgot everything, he took her in his arms.

"My darling, my Muriel, do you really care for my look or words?"

Her face was answer enough for him; he read in her blushes that had he only been free he might have taught her to love him.

Alas! alas! their love was among life's might have been. Muriel was the first to remember this. She caught herself from Guy's arms, saying brokenly, and in a tone of mute reproach—

"Isabel!"

"I never loved her—never! Muriel, my darling, we have nothing to reproach ourselves with, even if I had never have seen you. Isabel could have been nothing to me but a pretty childish plaything."

"She is not a child—she is just my age."

"Only you have a soul, and she has none." They stood together in silence, Muriel Yorke

with a little pain at her heart such as all women know when they have given their love in vain; and yet a pain mingled with joy; for one look into Guy's eyes, one sound of his voice told her that he loved her.

"Muriel," he said at last. "What are we to do? I love you with all my heart and soul! I believe I have loved you ever since I saw you, but my word is pledged to Isabel."

The girl never hesitated.

"You must be true to her."

"Fool that I was to burden myself with such a promise, to pledge my word!"

"But you loved her once?"

"Never! Pretty as she is, Belle never had any charm for me; she was only a child when our marriage was planned. I consented to please a man who had been my best friend, and who was on his death-bed. I thought I had done with love."

"Then you loved before? Did she die?"

"She killed me, she killed my faith and love at one blow. Muriel, from the day she deceived me I never cared to look into a woman's face until to-night—never once."

She was crying gently; happiness had come so near, and yet was to pass her by.

"After all," cried Guy, impatiently, "why should we both be sacrificed to Isabel? If I marry her, two lives will be writhed, perhaps. Therefore how can I make her happy when my whole heart is aching for the love of you?"

Muriel shook her head.

"You are Isabel's. If she released you, it would be different, but as it is you belong to her."

"And you?"

"And I!" with a strange pain in her voice. "Oh I shall live it down!"

"And marry Dick?"

"No!" with a tremor of indignation. "I shall never marry anyone, never while I live."

"With your face? You talk impossibly."

"Isabel never marry while I live," repeated Muriel, slowly. "I am only nineteen, but I don't think my life would hold two loves."

"And you love me?"

In words, she did not answer him; the anguish of that interview was more than she could bear. Guy drew her close to him, and printed some feverish kisses on her lips.

"Farewell, my darling!" he said, sadly; "you have restored my faith in women; you have taught me what truth is. I shall keep my promise, Muriel; but ah! at what a cost!"

Very gently Muriel disengaged herself from his grasp and walked away. Guy stood watching her until her long white drapery was out of sight; then, with a smothered sigh, he went to the ball-room to hide his misery under the disguise of a courteous host. Muriel was certainly not prepared for the signs which met her upstairs. Since the advent of the other guests, she and Isabel had shared the same room. As she entered it, she saw Miss Norton sitting down by the fire, pale as a little ghost, her thin dress dripping with water, her thin satin shoes wet through and through.

Oh Belle, what have you done?"

"I did not mean to be so long," panted Isabel; "but I was detained, and it began to rain. Oh! Muriel, I am wet through, my dress is quite spoilt."

"But why did you go out?"

"Will you keep my secret?"

For a moment Muriel hesitated, since all innocently she was Isabel's rival. Ought she to listen to her confidence?

"I must tell someone," went on Belle, in her childish way; "the secret is killing me."

The girl who was so few months her senior, and yet who seemed so much older in womanliness and tenderness put one arm round her.

"Tell me, Belle!"

"I want to see him."

"Who?" thinking she was in a dream.

"My lover! Oh Muriel! I can't marry Guy, I don't care for him. I love someone else."

It was a weight from Muriel's heart. If Isabel gave Guy his freedom, why, then, her-

love could be no longer a sin. A strange rapture came into her face.

"Don't try and persuade me," whispered Belle, "it's no use. Guy is very good, but I am afraid of him."

"Who is it?" asked Muriel. "Oh! Belle, is he a good man? Will he make you happy?"

"He will make me happy, because I love him. I don't think he is a good man; but then I am tired of goodness. Guy has made me weary of it."

Again Muriel repeated her question.

"Who is it?"

"Someone you have seen, for he told me he travelled part of the way with you."

"Not Mr. Lenson?"

"And why not? He is young and handsome. He loves me to distraction."

The other girl forgot that her own chances of happiness depended upon Belle's breaking her troth.

"Don't marry Mr. Lenson, dear," she urged. "I am sure he is not worthy of you."

"But I love him, Muriel. He is so gay and handsome, and he worships me!"

"What does your mamma think of him?"

"She hardly knows him; besides, she sees everyone with Guy's eyes, and he hates Cyril."

Isabel had changed her dress while she spoke. She looked prettier than ever in a costume of silver gauze. Muriel bent over and kissed her.

"Will you ask your mamma to excuse me, dear? I have a headache, and would rather not come downstairs again to-night."

Belle flitted away, and Muriel, throwing herself, dressed as she was, upon the bed, fell into an uneasy sleep, troubled by a fearful dream, in which she and Guy stood together within a hand's distance of each other, when Cyril, Lenson's dark form suddenly stepped between them, and shut out all view of the Earl from her gaze. She awoke with a smothered sob, to find the fire still burning, the room bright with gas candles, and Isabel Norton leisurely undressing herself, as composed as though she had never in her life heard such words as love, marriage, betrothal. Belle came over to her, with a little cry.

"You frightened me dreadfully!" she said. "You have been moaning in your sleep so."

"Have I?"

"I wish you had been downstairs. It was a splendid party. Mamma says it is the best she has ever given."

"And you enjoyed it, Belle?"

"Of course."

"Even without Mr. Lenson?"

"Well, I saw him this evening. I was with him quite before he left."

"Did he ask you to meet him?"

"Yes."

"He ought not to!" said Muriel, slowly. "Belle, don't you see how selfish he is? He makes you take all the risks—all the danger. If he loves you so, why doesn't he come boldly to the castle and ask to see your mother?"

"He can't, Muriel, he's so poor. He says mamma would think it was my money he wanted."

If she had only known it! She had no money—not a hundred pounds in all the world. If Mr. Lenson had known this, his wooing would not have been quite so ardent.

### CHAPTER III.

CHRISTMAS DAY dawned bright and cold. There was no trace of last night's rain; the air was clear and frosty. Muriel Yorke rose with a strange, new happiness at her heart. Lord Alwyn loved her, and Isabel was weary of her dance. Very soon—his night had few days, it might be a few weeks—Guy would be free. The love that last night had seemed so hopeless, so full of pain, would yet have a happy ending.

Muriel dressed herself, and stood by the bright fire, looking at her presents. A tray stood on the table heaped with offerings,

for she was a favourite with all the guests. No one had forgotten her—from Mrs. Norton, a gold locket to the niece's Christmas card. Everyone had had some kind thought for Muriel; but what pleased her most was a bunch of bright, red holly berries, yet sprinkled with morning dew. A little note accompanied it, without beginning or end. Only a few lines in the dear, bold handwriting, which had such power to touch her heart.

"While the holly tree is green, I shall remember last night. As its leaves live through the winter, cold, and frost, so will my love survive the chill of absence and separation."

While the holly tree is green! It meant that his love would last all time, and in a little while that love would no longer be hopeless. Muriel sat with the holly berries in her hand, full of happy thoughts; as changed from the sad, heart-broken girl of last night as that girl herself was changed from the way, little household fairy of Elysian road.

"Muriel!"

The voice was weak and husky. Lost in her own sweet dreams Muriel did not hear it. The summons was repeated, then she turned and saw Isabel sitting up in bed, with flushed, feverish cheeks and eyes, all too bright for health.

"I feel so ill!"

And she looked it. Muriel remembered her expedition of the night before—her dripping garments, her wet feet. She saw that ungentled cold and exposure had had their effect.

"How do you feel? Does your head ache?"

"It aches fearfully; and I am so burning hot, and yet I keep shivering. Muriel, do you think I am going to be very ill?"

"I hope not."

"I mustn't be ill! I won't be ill! Bend your head closer, dear, and I will tell you my secret."

"You did tell it me."

"But not all. We are going away to-night!"

"Going away!"

Cyril says it is the only plan. Mamma would never consent to our marriage; she is so wrapped up in Guy. We are going to London. When once I am his wife, Cyril will write and tell mamma."

Young as she was, Muriel saw the utter misery poor Belle was preparing for herself.

"You will break your mother's heart!" she said, indignantly. "You are all she has. How can you think of leaving her?"

"A shadow passed over Belle's face."

"It won't be for long. I am to meet Cyril to-night. Mamma won't know of my absence till to-morrow at breakfast; then she will only have a few hours' suspense before she hears that I am Mrs. Cyril Lenson."

Muriel wrung her hands.

"Isn't it sweet to you?" she said, fondly. "You won't listen to me; but oh! Belle, you will make yourself miserable for life!"

"I can't help it, Muriel."

"Do you really love Mr. Lenson so much?"

Belle shuddered.

"I think I do."

"But yet you tremble when you speak his name. You can't love him!"

"I do! I love him dearly; but I am afraid of him, Muriel. He is vexed with me because I have put off our flight so often. He thinks I do not care;—and a strange sadness was in her voice;—he can't understand that though I love him it costs me something to leave my home."

The breakfast gong rang out.

"Go down," said Belle, more cheerfully; "don't wait for me. If mother asks any questions, say that I am very tired."

Muriel regarded her of her presents, which stood disregarded on the table; she looked at her head, and waned them away.

"I couldn't look at them—I dare not. Oh! Muriel, I am not quite heartless. Whenever I hear my mother's voice, whenever Guy speaks kindly to me, I feel as if I wish I had died before I brought such sorrow on them."



Muriel went down to breakfast with the holly berries in her dress. Everyone else had assembled. She noticed, as in a dream, that the Earl looked pale and careworn.

He never noticed his betrothed's absence; his one care seemed to be that his eyes should not meet Muriel's blue ones. In the walk to church he placed himself in front of her, and never once turned his head. He seemed to be listening to his companion's conversation; in reality, he heard no word of it, his whole mind was occupied with one bitter conflict—the struggle between love and honour.

Isabel appeared at lunch, looking very white and fragile; she coughed ominously, and her voice was faint and broken; anyone could see that she was ill. Guy's place was at her side, and he treated her with unusual kindness; his manner was not a lover's—it never could be such to her—but it had a grave tenderness many women would have thought precious.

Not till quite late in the afternoon did he and Muriel stand face to face. He spoke no word, only he took her hand in both of his, and looked straight down into her blue eyes.

"Muriel!"

She forgot that she knew what he did not, that he had no idea Isabel herself meant to free him from his toils. His face was wan and haggard, and his voice well-nigh broken; but her smile had a strange hopefulness. When she answered him there was no sadness in her words.

"Thank you!" and she touched the holly berries. "I shall keep them always for your sake!"

"To remind you of what might have been, Muriel. Why should we two be sacrificed? I looked at you and Belle to-day, and I wondered if anyone in the whole world could marvel that after seeing you I shrank from marrying my pretty, childish cousin."

"Think kindly of her," pleaded Muriel. "Oh, Lord Alwyn, whatever happens never be harsh with Isabel."

He looked surprised.

"I am not likely to be harsh with her. Do you think making her unhappy would take one iota from my pain? Muriel, I want to tell you something; I am going away."

"Going away!"

"My wedding is fixed for April, but I can't stay here till then; I think it would drive me mad to see the preparations for my own misery. I will come back in time to keep my promise, but I can't stay here now and torture myself with the thought of what might have been. Child, we may never meet again—at best we never can meet, as we are now. Look into my eyes, Muriel, and tell me you forgive me for having spoilt your life."

She answered him with simple, earnest words, but Guy was not satisfied. There was no despair in her voice. She did not seem to realize that if ever they met again his wife would be at his side, and she, Muriel, must be as nothing to him.

They parted to dress for dinner. Mrs. Norton had made many pretty presents to her god-daughter, among others a charming evening dress of pale blue cashmere, trimmed with silver braid. Muriel put it on with a sigh, half for the misery written on her lover's face, half for the grief which must come to her hostess so soon. She stood still in front of the grand mirror, the maid putting a last touch to her hair, when Isabel came in, still in her warm winter costume.

She sent the maid away, and looked at the door; then she flung herself on the ground at Muriel's feet, and took her friend's hand to cover it with kisses.

"Do you love me?" she asked, wistfully. "Oh! Muriel, you are the only friend I have; there is no one to help me but you. Won't you be merciful to me?"

Very tenderly Muriel raised her, and placed her in a chair, then with one arm round her she whispered that she loved her dearly; that anything in her power she would do freely, gladly, so as to ease the heavy burden which pressed on her friend's mind.

"And you will tell no one? Oh! Muriel, I have trusted you a great deal, but you don't know all."

"You have my promise, Belle."

"A promise is not enough. Put your hand in mine, and swear you will not reveal what I am going to tell you."

"Surely you can trust me?"

"No; swear it."

Every instinct of Muriel's heart revolted from the idea, but she was alarmed at Isabel's manner. She saw that she was both ill and agitated; to calm her agonized fears was the girl's first object, and so she yielded.

"Say it after me," said Belle, feverishly.

"I, Muriel York, do solemnly swear and promise to keep the secret I am about to hear, and never to reveal it without your consent."

Very slowly came the words. Isabel listened greedily; then she spoke.

"You seemed to wonder this morning how I could bear to leave mamma. You seemed surprised Cyril should have so much power over me. Muriel, you don't guess what I have done. Heaven help me, I am his wife!"

"His wife!"

She almost fancied Isabel's mind was wandering. It seemed impossible, incredible.

"It is quite true; we were married before I ever saw you!"

"But how—why?"

"We went to the next town, about ten miles off; it is only a little place, and mamma never goes there for anything, so no one knew me. Cyril grew so jealous and impatient when he heard Guy was coming home, and I—I loved him so, I would have done anything in the world for him!"

It came upon Muriel with a pang that she spoke of her love in the past tense.

"Why don't you speak?" cried Belle. "Why don't you reproach me for my deceit?"

"I can't. But, oh! Isabel, I hope you will never repent the sacrifice you have made."

"I regret it now. Yes," seeing Muriel's face of terror, "but don't look so shocked, I never cared for Guy; even if I were free I would not marry him, but I do regret my marriage. Cyril has never been the same since; he says cruel things to me sometimes. He loves me dearly; but oh! Muriel, I wish he had a tithe of Guy's kindness."

"But surely he is not unkind?"

"He is so poor, he wants money so badly, and you know, though we are rich, I have very little in my pocket. Mamma buys all I want, but she never thinks of giving me much to keep in my purse."

"And Mr. Lenson begs of you?"

"He says all I have is his, but I haven't been able to get him much. That is why he wants to take me away; he says mamma will have to be generous then."

A fit of coughing stopped her. When it was over she sank back white and exhausted on her friend's shoulder.

"You cannot go, my darling!" cried Muriel, fondly. "You are not fit for it; you may be ill for weeks and months if you take such a journey to-night."

"I must go," said Belle, simply, fixing her eyes on Muriel, "unless you will save me."

"I?"

"Cyril is waiting at the little arbour in the shrubbery. He said he would be there to-night till nine o'clock. Muriel, let me not go to him—if I send no message—he will come up to the house, and denounce me to my mother and Guy. Think of the disgrace. Their heads will be bowed to the earth with shame."

"And I can save you?"

"You, and you only."

"But how?"

"Listen, you must meet Cyril in my place."

"But Mr. Lenson will not be satisfied with my meeting him."

"You can convince him that I am really ill, that it is no idle excuse; and—she blushed guiltily as she took a little box from her pocket—give him this, it is the most valuable trinket

I have, and there is not a shilling in my purse."

The tears were standing in Muriel's eyes. How she had envied Isabel Norton! When she met her at Allerton station not a month before she had thought hers the happiest lot on earth; and now she found that even her own life in Elysian road, with all its petty struggles for daily bread, its bitter self-denial, was happiness compared to the burden this pretty, spoilt child had taken upon her own shoulders. "You will not refuse me," pleaded Isabel. "Look at me, Muriel, do I look fit for a long night journey? Can you send me forth on one?"

"But—"

"Listen; you must go or I. If you refuse my prayer I will drag myself to the place, though it kills me! I will not bring this crowning misery upon my mother. Guy will have much to forgive me, but he shall not have to reproach me with disgracing his house with my husband's presence."

"And he would call it a disgrace?"

"Yes, he hates Cyril. I can't understand why, for it cannot be jealousy. Guy never loved me—never."

The dinner bell had sounded; Isabel turned an appealing glance upon her friend.

"Yes or no?"

She looked fragilily lovely as she stood there, the hectic flush upon her face, her eyes dazzling in their brilliancy. It was a bitter night—dry, but with a cold, cutting, easterly wind; to send Belle out in it in her delicate state was surely sending her to her death.

"I will go!"

"You darling! Tell him that I am ill—that I send what will help him for a day or two, but I will write fully to-morrow."

"I don't like it," said Muriel. "I would rather you had asked me anything else in the world, but I can't refuse you."

"I will bless you for ever; and you have sworn to keep my secret. You are not weak and wavering like me; I know I can trust you to be true to your oath."

Aye, Muriel meant to be true, but she little recked at what a cost. She little dreamed that that it was her own life's happiness she was offering upon the altar of friendship.

She took the little box, received Belle's last directions, and then she went downstairs.

"I shall stay here," said Belle, wearily. "I am too ill to come downstairs. Oh! Muriel, you have saved my life. I think it would have killed me to go out into the Park to-night."

A shadow rested on the party downstairs. Lord Alwyn was in no lively mood; try as he would to conquer his depression it was too much for him.

Mrs. Norton fortunately had not taken a serious view of Belle's indisposition, and so was still bright and cheerful, but the dinner party was not a success. Somehow, Belle's pretty face was sorely missed; and when people saw the cloud on the Earl's brow, they murmured to each other they had been mistaken, after all, and he really loved the pretty child he was to marry.

They left the dining-room early, and the gentlemen soon followed them. Muriel felt, rather than knew, it was eight o'clock. Very soon she must fulfil her fatal promise. Fortune did not favour her, for Mrs. Norton asked her to sing, and once at the piano it was always hard for her to get away. The Earl crossed to her side at last.

"Sing 'Sweetheart,' he whispered, as she was just rising from the music stool.

"I can't; it is getting late."

"It is very little after eight; coffee is not up yet."

"I must go upstairs. I want to see Isabel."

"Poor child! do you think she is very ill?"

"I fear so."

"Tell her to get better," he said, gravely, "for her mother's sake, Muriel."

His complete faith in her excuse, his utter acceptance of it, touched the girl strangely. It proved to her how he trusted her, and she was going to deceive him! As she went upstairs

Muriel regretted bitterly that she had ever received Belle's confidence or promised to help her.

She opened the door of her own room, Isabel was not there. A maid appeared who told her Miss Norton seemed so feverish she had thought it best to move her to her mother's dressing-room.

"My mistress can't bear Miss Isabel to be away from her if she's not well, Miss."

Muriel looked at her sleeping friend. The restlessness had all gone from the face now, she slept peacefully as a little child. She looked little more than a child lying there, her flaxen hair loose and floating over the pillow. To see her thus who would have guessed her burdened with such secrets as a clandestine marriage and a husband she feared?

Muriel bent and kissed her friend, and then, muffling a shawl about her, she went down the private staircase to the grounds. The moon was bright and clear, but the cold was bitter, and she shivered as she walked towards the spot appointed by Belle for her husband's waiting-place. She had not gone far when a hand was laid on her shoulder, and she found herself face to face with Guy.

But oh! how his face was changed, the eyes which had seemed all tenderness were full of bitter scorn, the mouth trembled, strong man as he was, with indignation.

"What does this mean?"

She was speechless; she had forgotten that the windows of the smoking-room faced the Park, and that they were seldom sheltered; she had forgotten that her thin dress made her a conspicuous object, and that the moonlight was well-nigh as bright as day.

"What does this mean?"

He waited for her answer; and oh! how could she answer then? The truth she must not speak, her oath forbade. And even if she could have taught her lips to lie to him, she knew it would have been useless. There was no deceiving the stern gaze of the man before her.

"I cannot tell you!"

"You are not futile in excuses. Perhaps you exhausted your stock of falsehoods just now, when you refused to sing to me because Isabel wanted you."

"I went to Isabel, but she was asleep!"

"And why did you come here?"

"I cannot tell you?"

The clock struck nine, she tried to escape his grasp. Let me go," she cried, frantically; "I shall be too late!"

He turned on her with quiet scorn.

"I see now, your own hands have betrayed you—you were going to meet a lover!" And I thought you pure and truthful. I loved you as my own soul. From love of you I longed to break the chains which bound me to an innocent child because, forsooth, she had not your charms. I thank Heaven Isabel has not your charms, since it leads you to break hearts for the amusement of an hour."

"You are cruel!"

"And what are you?" Did you not tell me last night you loved me? But for my engagement to that unhappy child would you not have left me my plighted wife?"

"I know all looks black against me," repeated Muriel; "but I loved you, wicked though it is to say so, when you are bound to Isabel. I love you still."

"You love me! And you shun my society that you may creep out like a fugitive from my house, and meet a man so unworthy any honest woman's regard that he dare not show himself by the light of day! Truly you think me easy to impose upon if you expect me to believe such a story."

"It is true!"

"Listen! Do you deny that you came out to meet someone?"

"No!"

"And you desired that meeting. Eagerly you entreated me just now to let you go, that you might keep your appointment."

"Yes!"

"Don't answer me in monosyllables," he

cried, passionately; "don't you see you are torturing me? Answer me one question—why did you come to meet this man?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Then he was your lover. If you could deny it—if there were any reason—though my imagination cannot picture one for your strange conduct—if there were any explanation of the circumstances, save that you came to meet your lover, it would be easy to give it."

She was standing at his side, white and motionless. He thought her hardened in deceit, for there was no confession, no revelation, in her manner. She might have been a queen, and he her subject. A little paler, a little graver than usual, that was all.

"I am waiting for your answer."

"I have none to give."

"Listen: I have loved you so, Heaven help me, I do love you so that I will give you one more chance. I think you love my aunt."

"I love her dearly."

"And you trust her?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, if you will explain to her why I found you here, and the nature of your business, I will accept her verdict as my own. I will never let her know the circumstances, if only she says they are harmless. You are too young," his voice shook; "you don't know how lightly girls imperil their reputation. It may be that you have erred through simple ignorance; accept my aunt as your friend and confidante."

"I cannot! Oh, why won't you understand, I can not tell anyone, her least of all!"

"You mean you are so in this man's power you dare not betray what claim he has on you."

"I mean that I can never reveal the object of my being here—that it is my secret."

"I am a fool, a miserable fool. Do you know I believed you were so pure and innocent? I would have staked my life upon your word!"

"And yet you judge me harshly?" For one moment, she lost her composure. "If you cared for me, surely you would be patient with me? Surely you would forgive me a slight concealment."

"A slight concealment!"

"I will put it differently. If you loved me you would not believe me guilty without proof!"

"If I loved you less I should trouble less; but Muriel, my love is a jealous, all-absorbing passion. Had you been my betrothed, this would have parted us. Do you think I could live and doubt you; that I could go on day by day, wondering how much or how little you had deceived me? No, Muriel, a faith once shaken cannot be restored."

They stood still in the bitter cold, the Christmas bells were ringing. All was joy and peace upon earth, but in their hearts there raged a fierce burning pain, an angry yearning nothing could assuage.

"You persist, then?" he asked her.

"I must."

"So be it. I will never willingly look upon your face again. I have already told my aunt I propose going up to London tomorrow. Our guests are hers rather than mine."

"And I shall never see you again?"

"Never if I can help it. When I am married, my wife must be my first care. Even if I could bear the sight, do you think I would let her innocence be sullied by the companionship of such a you?"

The consciousness of her innocence helped her as nothing else would—sooner or later he must know the truth. Belle would tell him, and then—out even the blissful prospect of the—and then could not quite soothe Muriel's heartache.

"Guy," she said at last in a faint almost extinguished voice, as though she were so weary, words would hardly come. "Guy, say one kind word to me before you go. I think it will kill me if I have to remember you by your cruel taunts."

"I can't," he answered. "It was hard

enough last night, when I thought nothing stood between us but my miserable engagement; but now—"

"But now!"

"You don't realize. I thought you all that was true and fair, and now I have been asking myself why Heaven gives such angel faces to women such as you!"

They were his last words. Another moment, and she had pushed past him and gained the house. He stood for a moment trying to realize his misery. "I must go to London to-morrow, or this place will kill me. Oh! the mockery of life, and the bitter truth—mockery of the phantom people call love."

Muriel went upstairs; there was but one desire in her mind—she must see Isabel, and tell her she had failed. She would tell her, too, that Lord Alwyn had met her. She must not whisper how very precious his good opinion was to her, but she might confess she had lost it, and beg Isabel, when her secret came out, to tell her cousin that Muriel Yorke had deserved none of the cruel taunts he had poured out to her.

But speech with Belle was impossible that night. The maid declared her young lady was still sleeping, and must not be disturbed. Poor Muriel crept away to her own room and fairly sobbed herself to sleep, her holly berries beneath her pillow.

She slept late from sheer exhaustion. When she awoke the late winter sunshine was pouring into her room, and the maid stood at the bedside with a letter.

"But you do look tired, Miss Yorke," said the girl kindly. "And I'd never have disturbed you, but that there's a letter come my mistress thought you ought to have."

Muriel sat up, and supported her aching head on one arm, as she tried to think. Bit by bit it all came back to her—her promise to Isabel, its failure, and the cruel scorn it had brought on her from Lord Alwyn.

"How is Miss Isabel?"

"She's not well at all, Miss Yorke; she's in bed still, and my mistress has sent for the doctor. It doesn't seem like Christmas, miss," continued Mary, who was talkative by nature; "my lord has gone up to London; and he went by the first train."

Muriel understood he had gone by it to avoid seeing her. She stretched out her hand for the letter.

Mary hesitated.

"You mustn't be frightened, Miss Yorke!" showing the edge of a yellow envelop. "Many people send a telegram when they're too busy to write a letter."

It came on Muriel with a shock something was wrong at home; the household in the Elysian-road were not given voluntarily to spend shillings in the place of pence.

It was the first telegram she had ever received, and to her life's end she never quite forgot the thrill of horror which ran through her as she read:

"Come home at once, your father is ill."

Another moment and she was on her feet, with weak trembling fingers beginning her toilet; but Mary would have nothing of that. With respectful peremptoriness she wrapped Muriel in a dressing-gown, and produced a tray spread with a dainty breakfast.

"There is no train till twelve, miss," said the maid, kindly. "My mistress has ordered the dog-cart for eleven; we feared there was something wrong."

It seemed to Muriel that all the events of her visit to Allerton faded into indistinctness since that fearful pain at her heart grew numb. Her maid had gone back to the little house in Elysian-road, and she counted the minutes till she was there.

Only when she was dressed did she begin to wonder why Mrs. Norton had not come to her—how it was that her godmother had left the breaking of bad news to a servant.

"Where is Mrs. Norton?" she said to Mary.

"Shall I go to her?"

"Mistress is in Miss Isabel's room, Miss Yorke! I'll go and see."



But, she brought back no tender message, only a little note.

"Misses seems strangely anxious about our young lady, miss. I hope you won't think it unkind she has not come to you."

Muriel guessed what she should find in the note. It did seem hard that the punishment of Isabel's sins should fall on her.

"My nephew has told me of your meeting in the Park last night. I can only endorse every word he said. You are going home. I pray that your mother's influence may soften your heart. I shall always feel an interest in you, but, for Isabel's sake, I cannot ask you to repeat your visit.—ROSALEE NORTON."

Muriel's action, on reading this, was characteristic. With her own hands she collected every present Mrs. Norton had given her, from the dresses bought with her cheque to the gold locket received only the day before. These she placed in the wardrobe, and dressed herself in the old blue serge which fortunately had accompanied her to Allerton. The only relic of the Norton family which she carried with her was Lord Alwyn's bunch of holly berries. Somehow she could not bear to part with them; he had said their love was like the holly. Well, the holly has its thorn."

At the station a surprise awaited her. Dick Greville was on the platform, waiting to hand her into the train.

"Dick!"

"I could not help it, dear! I heard the bad news, and thought I might travel up with you to town for auld friendship sake."

Side by side they took their seats.

"Muriel!" said Dick, simply. "What is the matter?"

"Dad's ill."

"But there's something else! Child, you look as if you'd broken your heart!"

To his surprise she clung to him with a little sobbing cry.

"I think I have, Dick—and—oh! nothing will mend it—nothing while I live!"

"My poor child!"

"Dick," she whispered, as they lost sight of Allerton, "I wish we had never come here."

"I thought you were happy here, Muriel?"

She shook her head.

"I wish I had never left home. Allerton is very grand; but oh, Dick! it is full of sorrow."

"I like Lord Alwyn," said Dick firmly; "as friend and master I valued him; and, yet I am going to leave him. Has he told you, Muriel?"

"Going to leave him! Why?"

"You mustn't blame yourself, darling, only when I first saw the house he meant for me it was when I hoped to bring you to it. I pictured you in the little place making its sunshine; and somehow, Muriel, it can never be home without you."

"Oh! Dick, I am so sorry!"

"It isn't your fault, pet. I could no more help loving you than the sun could help shining; only, Muriel, I can't stay in Allerton, and I told the Earl so the first night we met at the Castle."

"But you are going back, Dick? You have not really left Allerton now?"

"Ay, I have left it for ever. The old tenant will send on my things. I've a glorious scheme in my head, Muriel. I shall go to the Far West. I've capital enough to give me a fair start there. I shall not forget you, Muriel, anywhere on earth; only, if I'm to live alone, I'd rather it shouldn't be in the place where I used to plan our lives together."

She gave one little cry.

"Oh, Dick! Why are you so good to me? Why don't you reproach me for my wretchedness, and tell me I've wrecked your life?"

"I couldn't, dear; it's not your fault."

"Dick, do you know I've come away in disgrace? Mrs. Norton didn't even say good-bye to me."

"More shame for her."

"Don't you want to know what I've done?"

"Nothing wrong, I'll be bound."

"It's very strange."

"I fancy I can guess the reason."

"What?"

"It's easy to see, my dear, the Earl's heart is not in his marriage. He could hardly see you day by day in his own home, and not find out the difference between you and his cousin."

"Dick!"

"It's no fault of yours, dear, but it's true; and if Mrs. Norton found it out, it would be no pleasant news for her."

The afternoon was closing in when their cab rattled over the stones in Elysian-road. Dick gave one glance at the house, when the horse stopped, and then he uttered a silent prayer that Muriel might not look at the windows of her home, for only one was darkened; and Dick knew quite well it was not because the daylight was nearly over, but because someone within that house had gone to their last sleep.

One of the little boys opened the door, and then Muriel knew all; the child ran into her arms.

"Oh Muriel! Muriel! he wanted you so badly."

"Papa!" It was all she said.

"It was typhus fever, they say he will never suffer any more; but, oh, Muriel, he was all we had. And now there's no one to take care of us, and we are orphans, mother says."

The mother had heard their voices, and came forward to greet her child. Dick went back to the waiting cab; he felt he could do nothing for his darling then. His work was done when he saw her in her mother's arms.

((To be concluded in our next.))

## AGGRESSIVE PHYSICAL HEALTH.

SOME people make it a particular rule to give their positive opinions on subjects they know nothing about and so cannot justly judge. How should a sturdy, brawny-fisted mass of bone and muscle who was never in a sick-room in his life know all about the proper treatment of a patient? And still nine-tenths of these considerate people improve their opportunities to air their inconsistent ignorance and convince all their reasoning hearers that their own good health is purely physical.

The person who doesn't remember an ache or pain in the link of years strung out behind him is usually an inveterate bore to the less favoured ones who are unfortunate enough to know him; he knows just how an invalid should conduct himself, how he should make up his mind to get well, make himself believe that he is, eat heartily, bounce about the house like a skipper in a cheese, &c.; that he thinks so is all sufficient.

Periodical melancholy fits, medicines, moans, and all evidences of suffering, he deems superfluous and proof positive of the person's inferiority to himself in purely an intellectual sense. He cannot detect the coarseness of his own ignoble principles, or his gigantic selfishness, as shown by his predictions and medical prescriptions, his want of consideration for aught but his own convenience. A conscienceless brute, he goes around muttering incoherently or grumbling of disagreeable company, laziness, stupidity and the like, while he lavishes any amount of sympathy upon his poor, abused self.

If only people had a due allowance of sense their health would be like that of their critic, we are expected to believe. He is full of complaint at all times, yet he boasts of perfection in mind and body. To his reasoning a sick person is an abomination; the presence of one is a gross insult to his royal dignity, and if the offender is a household companion, the pale face, sunken eyes, spiritless movements, and all the mute attendants, make of him a martyr, deserving the constant condolence of the community.

The gruff, self-important man, with a delicate wife and a few servants to attend his many wants, storms around the house, puffing like a

locomotive after a hard run, and blowing like a cyclone with no less degree of destructiveness, though he may spare his furniture in mercy to his pocket. He can control his wrath when he sees that the missiles he is about to hurl at his enemies are liable to bounce back and strike himself on their return. But the sense of self-security is an instinct always, however, strongly marked in the cruel depredator who acts under temporary fits of insanity—the word insanity need not be applied to his condition until the law takes hold of him, and it snugly fits the convenience of the case in hand.

People say, let the sick suffer without lamenting. How very generous! Moderate illness, they say, should be borne with a gentle cheerfulness, so as to impose no surrounding gloom. What remarkable kindness to bear this placid upon their vicissitudes for the benefit of the sufferer! How considerate of their own comfort, while cutting bits of speech are ever mixed in for the general effect! This is indeed practical charity. The meaning, in a nutshell, is, "While you are sick we've absolutely no use for you; bear that in mind." Invalids should betake themselves to the most remote corner of the attic or cellar, and there stifle their prayers for the return of health in fear of disturbing the merry-making of the household.

There is seldom any credit given, but it is my opinion that the sufferer usually grumbles less than do those shallow-souled creatures who are ever awake to frolic and sport, and has, too, more regard for the feelings of those in his company, either in word or deed.

I have visited families where the invalid was the only one about the premises expected to be amiable, unless an outsider were present, and the constant suffering of months and years actually made "the burden of them all" the most patient and agreeable one at all times. The craving of health and youth must be gratified, and so gaiety must be indulged in at any cost to their associates.

We hear drumming upon tired pianos, loud ringing, boisterous laughter, romping and riot as of a pandemonium, when the one under the same roof suffering with an attack of nervous headache is never thought of for a moment. If that is charity, I'm sure no one subject to that form of indisposition will ever be convinced of the truth of it. If the one subject to hysteria and neuralgia is not deserving of mercy as to sight and sound, then no person is.

We see some families, in which there is one whose days are numbered, contribute liberally to the noisy demonstrations by which Bank Holidays are often accompanied. On these holidays the male portion of such families doesn't want to be behind the times; he wants as much as possible of his enjoyment to be heard by his friends at home, to assure his share of importance; he wants to show his enthusiasm and his sense of freedom from restraint; he joins the throng head and heels, never stopping to count the cost, and takes active part in the formalities which should be carried on, if sensibly and humanely conducted far away from the city's thoroughfares.

I dislike to acknowledge that I could wish any one harm; and I could not unless the ill had concealed it in a blessing for such persons and those who have to contend with them. But if people whose healthfulness makes them intolerably aggressive to less fortunate ones could in answer to my prayer have just one short but severe spell of illness, one that would rack their heads until they believed them taking a course in a threshing machine, there would be a beneficial result. If they had a spark of humanity within them, they would then be touched to demonstrate more consideration for those who suffer pain in their sight and hearing than is now generally practised. After all, we need not be charitable—it would be absurd to ask for what there is so very little of in human nature; we only perform our duty when we are a trifle partial in our treatment of the sick. D. M.

## FACETIÆ.

## COMPANIONS IN ARMS—Twins.

A thing that no family should be without—a marriage certificate.

She is out of print now—the woman who went back on calico to wear silk.

CHARLOTTE BROOKS says "women feel just as men feel." Charlotte has evidently had some experience in feeling.

The time of young ladies is divided into two parts. Half of the time they wait for the mails, and the other half for the males.

Sign in the shop window—"Boy wanted." Young wife to her husband: "My dear, isn't that too bad? I suppose they have all girls."

Proverbs may not be a characteristic of the royal family, but some breezy day you ought to go out into the kitchen and hear the queens-waive.

Mrs. B. (to Mrs. B.): "Come, Mary, press over; there comes Mrs. Parks; she's just lost her husband, and we'd better give her a wide berth until we find out how much he's left her."

A young lady called at a box-office one day last week and inquired for "two circular dress seats." The genial ticket seller charitably handed out a couple of dress circle seats without a word.

TADDER says: "Spanking children should be done coolly, vigorously and with the aim to let the lesson sink deep into their hearts." That depends altogether upon the location of their little hearts.

"Do birds think?" asks a writer in opening a current article. "If they do we would like to know what a canary bird thinks of the fat woman who stands up in a chair and 'talks baby' through the wires of its cage?"

"How is Johnnie doing at school?" asked a lady of Johnnie's mamma during a call. "Splendidly. He talks in two languages now." "Dear me! What are they, French or German?" "Oh, no. English and profane."

A FRAGMENT OF CONVERSATION between young girls: "Do you know what a preface is?" "No; do you?" "Not exactly; only I know that it is at the beginning of books." "Oh, well; that it must be the same as when we are courted before entering on marriage."

A NEAT COMPLIMENT—"Do you ever gamble?" she asked, as they sat together, her hand held in his. He replied: "No; but if I wanted to now would be my time." "How so?" "Because I hold a beautiful hand." The engagement is announced.

HE TAKES A TUMBLE.—What to him was love or hope? What to him was joy or care? He stepped on a bit of mottled soap the girl had left on the topmost stair, and his feet flew out like wild fierce wings, and he struck each stair with a sound like a drum, and the girl below with the scrubbing things laughed like a band to see him come.

A FORTUNATE MARRIAGE.—The following conversation was overheard in the cloak-room at a fashionable assemblage: "Did she marry well?" "Yes, indeed. He's worth over a million, and drinks so hard that he never can go into society, so she's not bothered with him."

"At that," continued the story-teller, who was narrating a personal experience, "my face fell." "Did anybody pick it up?" interrupted a listener. "What do you mean?" "Oh, nothing; only if somebody had picked it up and hid it away out of sight, it would have been such a relief to your friends."

"DENNIS, my boy," said a schoolmaster to his Hibernian pupil, "I fear I shall make nothing of you; you've no application." "An' sure enough, sir," said the quick-witted lad, "isn't it myself that's always been told there is no occasion for it? Don't I see every day in the newspapers that No Irish need apply?"

What is that which is so brittle that, if you name it, you are sure to break it?—Silence.

Why are seven days like a fever?—Because they make one week.

An Emeraldaler, on admiring a beautiful cemetery, observed that he considered it a healthy place to be buried in.

It is a fact not easily accounted for, that at parties—after supper—the guests begin to grow thin.

It is generally acknowledged that "blood will tell." The thing to be careful about is not to make confidants of your relatives.

"I now offer you a Rubens," said an auctioneer, "a perfect gem of genius—perhaps the finest painting that came from the master-hand." There was no bid. The auctioneer passed the Rubens, and, taking up another picture said: "Very well, gentlemen. I now offer you a Rembrandt by the same artist."

"I never ask a gentleman for money," said a tailor. "But suppose he doesn't pay you?" "Well, if he doesn't pay me within a reasonable time, I conclude he is not a gentleman—and then I ask him."

"I was not aware that you knew him," said Tom Smith to an Irish friend, the other day. "Knew him?" exclaimed he, in a tone that comprehended the knowledge of more than one lifetime; "I knew him when his father was a boy!"

GENTLEMAN (to his coachman)—"John, I have noticed that ever since your wife's death you have come home drunk every evening. Why is this?" John—"I am only trying to console myself for my loss." Gentleman—"And how long is this going to last?" John—"Oh, sir, I am irreconcilable."

"Oh, yes," said the eldest Miss Culture at table the other evening. "I breakfasted yesterday with Mrs. Brainweight, and we enjoyed a delicious repast—excellent coffee, superior bread and pieastorial globes, done admirably." "What?" asked her friend. "Pieastorial globes," repeated the maiden. "And what under the sun are they?" "I believe," said Miss Culture, drawing herself up stiffly, "I believe uncultured people call them fish-balls."

"What has become of Miss Blank, who was always such a favourite in your set?" "Her father failed some weeks ago, and all they had was sold by the sheriff." "Poor thing!" "And now they have to live in a little rented house out of town." "What a change! How she must grieve!" "Yes. She is so much changed that even her best friends would not recognize her. I met her in the street to day and did not know her at all, poor thing!"

A REFORMED PARROT.—In our cabin we had a menagerie of tame beasts and birds. When I was spoken to by this parrot, while passing, I turned and closely inspected its face. It winked. There was something in its mien, wink so pious, and something so austere in its voice, that I felt confirmed in my suspicion that this is the penitent parrot. Without being in the least annoyed by any one, and while seemingly gazing out in a dream over the blue sea, this bird would suddenly break out with a volley of mariners' patois and oaths enough to turn the air purple around it. At length, when it was heard that some ladies had declared they would never sail in a ship with such a bird again, it was resolved that the parrot must be cured of its bad habits, and so it was. Its oaths were invariably followed by a ducking. A large bucket of salt water was emptied on the poor bird's head each splash accompanied by a remark, "You've been swearing." Polly was thoroughly cured by this. Once, when the boat had shipped a heavy sea which gave the reformed parrot a severe shaking, the bird, conscious of its own innocence, descended from its perch and repaired to the place of poultry. There it walked up and down before the deluged fowls, saying: "You've been swearing! You've been swearing!"

Why is the conductor of an orchestra like the electric telegraph?—Because he loses time.

Two antics of students at our colleges are sometimes outrageous, but the work of the tutors themselves is generally questionable.

What class of people is that whom it is never necessary to urge to take more interest in their business?—Pawnbrokers.

Chambers, indeed, that when we should aim to improve, the horse that lowers his record is most commended.

"It's a great comfort to be left alone," said an Irish lover, "especially when your sweet-heart is wid' ye."

Steele-Islandation.—Michael thinks the two hours he spent in watering his garden just before it was soaked by a thunderstorm was a work of super-irrigation.

WILLIAM FOGG was asked regarding the latest addition to the English language, he said he would ask his wife, as she always had the last word.

NEVER ALONE.—"Bill Jones," said a bullying urethra to another lad, "next time I catch you alone I'll flog you like anything." "Well," replied Bill, "I ain't often much alone; I commonly have my legs and bats with me."

STUFF AND NONSENSE.—The absurd habit which some young ladies have nowadays of padding the backs of their heads with horse-hair, like sofa-cushions, may be wisely assumed up as stuff and nonsense.

A HANDICAPPED HUNGER lately slipped out of the homoeopathic hospital. He had been very sick, and confined to his room, but they had taken such good care of him that he was able to get out.

OLD LADY (to professor in astronomy)—"I can see how you learn about the size, and distance, and weight, and all the different motions of them ere stars; but I don't see how you ever learn their names."

"Oh, will he bite?" exclaimed one of the sweetest girls with a look of alarm, when she saw one of the dancing bears in the street the other day. "No," said her escort, "he cannot bite, he is muzzled; but he can hug." "Oh," she said, with a distracting smile, "I don't mind that."

At a recent dinner, where the host was somewhat inexperienced, there was a lull in the conversation, and he, with a view to relief, asked a mournful looking man if he were married. "No, I am a bachelor," stiffly replied the sombre man. "Ah," said the host, warming to his subject. "How long have you been a bachelor?" There was another lull in the conversation.

A MAN going home at a late hour in the night saw that the occupant of a house standing flush with the street had left a window up, and he decided to warn them and prevent a burglary. Putting his head into the window he called out: "Hallo! good peep!" That was all he said. A whole pailful of water struck him in the face, and as he staggered back a woman shrieked out: "Didn't I tell you what you'd get if you wasn't home by nine o'clock?"

A CLERGYMAN called on a poor parishioner, whom he found bitterly lamenting the loss of an only son, a boy about four or five years old. In the hope of consoling the afflicted woman, he remarked to her that, as so young could not have committed any very grievous sin, and that no doubt the child was gone to heaven. "Ah, sir," said the simple-hearted creature, "but Tommy was so shy—and they are all strangers there."

WHY SHE WENT CRAZY.—A young lady reading in a newspaper of a girl having been made crazy by a sudden kiss, called the attention of her uncle, who was in the room, to that singular occurrence, whereupon the old gentleman gruffly demanded what the fool had gone crazy for. "What did she go crazy for?" anxiously returned the ingenuous maiden. "Why, for more, I suppose."



## SOCIETY.

THE Queen, it is stated, will remain at Windsor, as in former years, until after the 14th of December, the anniversary of the deaths of the Prince Consort and Princess Alice, in order to take part in the solemn memorial service at the Royal Mausoleum at Frogmore, which will be conducted by the Dean of Windsor, Dr. Randall Davidson. Her Majesty will therefore probably start for Osborne about the 18th or 19th of December.

THE KING OF WURTEMBERG has arrived at Rome, with the intention of passing the winter there. The King and Queen of Italy, with the Prince of Naples, also returned to the Italian metropolis. Queen Margherita was looking particularly well, and was attired in a seal skin dolman, with tall felt Tyrolean hat trimmed with upright feathers. A magnificent rug of ermine was spread over their Majesties' knees.

MR. MURRAY has accepted a commission to paint the portrait of Sir Moses Montefiore, which will be exhibited at the Royal Academy next season. Among other noteworthy works will be a marble bust of Miss Mary Anderson, which Count Glischen is now at work upon.

AMONG the interesting marriages arranged for the New Year is one between Mr. Cuthbert Peek, eldest son and heir of Sir Henry Peek, the senior member for Mid-Surrey, and the Hon. Augusta Broderick, daughter of Lord Middleton, who was Sir Henry's colleague in the representation of Mid-Surrey until his accession to the peerage. Mr. Peek has recently returned from an extended voyage, and great things are expected of him.

LORD HOWARD OF GLOSCOP's death has broken up many Christmas parties that had been arranged, and placed many leading families in mourning. He never got over the severe illness of some months since when his life was despaired of, but this last attack was only of a few days' duration. Besides a son who succeeds, the late peer leaves two unmarried, and three married daughters, viz., the Marchioness of Bute, the Countess of Londonderry, and Lady Herries.

LADY NORTHCOOTE has been presented by a number of private friends with a portrait of Sir Stafford Northcoote, painted by Mr. Long, R.A. The presentation was made at The Pynes, Exeter, where the subscribers, all personal friends, met Sir Stafford and Lady Northcoote at dinner. Sir John Duckworth made the presentation, and Sir Stafford, on behalf of Lady Northcoote, acknowledged the gift.

THE marriage of Mr. Falbo, the Danish Minister, with Mrs. Gerard Leigh, of Luton Hoo, took place in the private chapel of that mansion in the most quiet manner possible, the ceremony being performed by Dr. Clough-ton, Bishop of St. Albans. The first husband of the bride (who is a daughter of the late T. Hawkes, Esq., M.P.) was the Hon. Dudley Ward, who died in 1870, and by whom she has a family, having been married in 1848. In 1872 she married J. G. Leigh, Esq., who died in 1875. Mr. Falbo and his bride left Luton Hoo the day after their marriage for Paris, and will spend a short time on the Continent.

THE Polo-Fancy Dress Ball, which took place at Brighton recently, was attended by nearly 700 of the élite of society there. The Pavilion was decorated with flowers, &c., for the occasion, and the electric light added brilliancy to the scene. Many visitors of distinction were present, and wore dresses which were much admired. Among these were that of Lady Hastings and Miss Pyle. The former, as "Moonlight," had on a robe de bal of moon-light satin and net, richly trimmed with a profusion of the same coloured beads, lace, and ribbon, elegantly arranged. The latter lady, as "Rouge et Noir," wore a dress of crimson and black satin, elaborately decorated with sequins and pearls, one black shoe and stocking, and one white stocking and shoe, and a belt brought from Monte Carlo.

## STATISTICS.

LEFT IN THE CAR.—No fewer than 18,659 articles found in hansoms and four-wheeled were handed over to the police authorities last year. In some instances the articles found were of considerable value, one being priced at £1,000. Another, a diamond, was valued at £500, and there was also a roll of bank-notes totalling £800. In one instance three £50 notes were handed over by the cabman, and as they were not claimed they were eventually handed back to him.

THE GERMAN ARMY.—It is estimated that Germany can almost immediately mobilize an army of thirty-eight thousand officers, one million, four hundred and fifty thousand men, twenty-seven thousand physicians and officials, and three hundred thousand horses, for which number all clothes, armaments, outfits, carts, &c., are provided in peace time, and held in readiness in the different garrisons. To the mobilized army would have to be added the surplus of drilled reserve and militiamen, numbering one hundred and fifty thousand men; the depot reserves of the first class, numbering two hundred and twenty thousand men; one contingent of recruits, one-year volunteers, volunteers under twenty years, and ten contingents of Landsturm, which make up a grand total of two million, eight hundred and thirty thousand trained men, commanded by officers who have fought some of the greatest battles of the century, and have never turned their backs upon the enemy.

## GEMS.

To suffer through those we love is ten times worse than to suffer ourselves.

Our happiness and misery are trusted to our conduct, and made to depend upon it.

He who can conceal his joy is greater than he who can conceal his griefs.

FALSEHOOD always endeavours to copy the mien and attitude of truth.

He is not likely to be a true man who is false to God.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PICKLED CABBAGE.—Select from solid heads, cut them into fine slices, wash, drain, put into a jar, and cover with boiling water; stand till cold, then drain off the water and season with grated horseradish, salt, black and red pepper, cinnamon, and cloves whole; cover with strong vinegar, and tie down.

CHRISTMAS SANDWICHES.—Ornament your sandwich in either of the following ways: (1) Blanch and split some sweet almonds, and stick them all over the cake at close and regular intervals, and set the cake in a moderate oven until the almonds are pale brown; sprinkle the whole with finely powdered loaf sugar. Dish on a fringed napkin with a border of frosted holly. (2) Glaze the cake like the tart, and before it sets sprinkle it thickly with white or pink sugar grains. The grains are coloured by rolling them lightly in a little diluted cochineal, after which they must be dried in a cool oven. Or place upon the glaze leaves and other devices cut out in Anglaise, candied lemon, orange, the citron; brightly coloured jelly, or dried fruits. If preferred, the sugar glaze itself may be coloured with a little cochineal. The sandwiches may also be made by taking the sponge cake in a thin layer in a shallow square baking tin. If thus, divide it in halves, spread one half with mince-meat and place the other half over it. Cut the sandwiches into finger lengths, coat each with sugar glaze, and sprinkle with sugar grains. Arrange them on a dish covered with a fringed napkin and garnish with small sprays of holly brushed with a stiff solution of gum arabic, and sprinkled with white sugar grains.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

OUR brains are seventy-year clocks. The angel of life winds them up once for all, then closes the case and gives the key into the hand of the angel of the resurrection.

NEARLY all the Prime Ministers of England reached a mature age before they attained to the honour. Mr. Gladstone was 59 when he first held the position. Lord Beaconsfield was 63, Lord Palmerston 70, Lord Derby 52, Sir Robert Peel 53; the Duke of Wellington 66, and Earl Russell 53. In striking contrast with these veterans appears the youthful Pitt, who became Prime Minister before he had completed his twenty-fifth year.

VISITORS to the Fisheries Exhibition may have noticed in the different Courts boards set up by the well-known *Dreadnought* Seamen's Hospital at Greenwich, detailing in various languages the number of sailors which each country had sent to the Hospital since its establishment in 1825, and the patients treated during 1892. Collecting-boxes in the shape of the old ship were attached, and during the Exhibition nearly £86 were contributed by this means. The amount collected in the various Courts was not always proportionate to the number of the special nationality treated, for the largest contributions came from Denmark, Japan, and the Straits Settlements. This plainly illustrates the cosmopolitan character of the work carried on, but unfortunately the Hospital sadly needs funds, and has been obliged to borrow £1,000 to meet current expenses.

THE NORWEGIAN SNOW SKATES.—The Norwegian snow skates must not be confused with the Canadian, which are much broader and used in a quite different way. The Norwegian snow skates are made entirely of wood; their length is about eight feet, and their breadth three inches to four inches, the forepart being a little pointed and curved upward. The under side is very smooth, sometimes with a little groove planed along the middle. Some people use them tightly fastened to the feet; others only put the forepart of the foot through a withy band fastened to the skate, which enables them to withdraw from it easily in case of a fall. The different parts of the country have their own shape of snow skates, either a little narrower or broader, shorter or longer. Only by the necessity of using the snow skates one can explain the wonderful experiences at which the Norwegian peasants arrive. In order to get to the top of a hill the skater takes up the sides of the hill, like a ship against the wind, sliding on the surface of the snow, and never lifting his feet from the ground, except when making a sidestep, or he goes straight up, lifting one foot sideways over the other. A staff, about five feet long, grasped with both hands, is used by some people, either on the left or right side. The hill chosen for exercise or matches is often hundreds of feet high and pretty steep, of course, according to the ability of the runner. Let us now commence the descent. After a few steps the speed soon increases so much that you can hardly breathe, and all your thoughts must be concentrated on keeping your balance. In the lower part of the hill the acceleration produces a speed which may sometimes be compared with that of an express train. Should you feel symptoms of an approaching loss of balance, you must use your staff, which will partly retard the speed. But if you use the staff too much, you are called a "staff rider," and not considered as a good runner; therefore, people avoid it as much as possible, and may never use it at all, even down the most difficult hills. There are often drops on the sides of the hill, either from following its natural outline, or caused by snow drifts. When the runner comes to one of these he has to make an aerial voyage, and the most difficult moment is when he comes to the ground again, as it is a matter of chance whether he will land on his feet or make a series of somersaults and be buried in the snow.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**DARTY R.**—The 18th June, 1815, came on a Sunday.  
**CARA.**—The numbers for 1870 will be sent post paid for 5s. 2d.

**C. C. R.**—Under the circumstances detailed the wife could sue her husband for desertion.

**F. R.**—Terminus is the singular, terminus is the plural. As a railway can hardly have more than one northern terminus, it would be wrong to use the plural.

**A. O. R.**—The English sentence, "Yours now and always," translated into Italian would read, "Vostro adesso e per sempre;" in Spanish, "Vuestro por ahora y siempre."

**B. D.**—If the young gentleman does not choose to take advantage of your invitation to call, it would be very wrong, and overstepping the bounds of maidenly decorum, for you to press him to do so.

**B. M.**—Paregoric consists of an alcoholic solution of opium, benzoic acid, camphor, and oil of anise, every fluid ounce containing two grains each of opium and benzoic acid, and a grain and a half of camphor.

**W. J. R.**—It would be an impossibility for us to give you instructions in oil painting in this limited space. It is an art that can be acquired only under proper tuition, and the lessons will cost you both money and time before a proper amount of proficiency is gained.

**R. S.**—The natural inference would be that the young lady regretted her refusal to the young man referred to, and wished him to renew his attentions. The "young man in a distant town" would be justified in annulling the contract of marriage between them.

**"WARNING INFORMATION."**—Sulphur being a purifier, brewers often employ a solution of sulphurous acid to wash out their beer barrels. Sulphur is also burned in old cider barrels to purify them. We know of no other use to which brewers put it.

**C. B. L.**—I. Not being of age we would advise you before taking any decisive steps, to consult a lawyer on the subject of your grievances. 2. The translation is "Study and Labour." 3. The letter you describe is simply an abbreviation of the word recipe. 4. Fair.

**CONVY G.**—1. His purpose is to get up a fiction, which on any married lady's part is reprehensible. 2. It is very questionable. 3. and 4. She would be justified in breaking the engagement. 5. Any polite phrase would be in accordance with etiquette.

**P. B. D.**—The young lady must assume that the correspondence is carried on for mere friendship's sake, until her friend gives her reason to believe that his feelings for her are deeper and stronger than those of a mere friend. It would be very indelicate and improper for her to ask her correspondent what his object is in writing.

**LILLY.**—To raise hyacinths in the winter place the bulbs in glasses or earthen, and set them in a dark closet to sprout. If glasses are used, the water should not be higher than one inch below the bulb, until the roots have reached it, when the glasses should be filled up, a piece of charcoal put in the water, and the plants set in the sun to grow.

**CORA.**—1. The date of the death of the Siamese twins was January 17, 1874. Their age at the time of death was 63 years. 2. The discovery of chloroform as an anæsthetic agent was first announced in 1832, by Doctor Samuel Guthrie, of Rackett's Harbour, N.Y. 3. Stephen Decatur did not die a natural death, being killed in a duel with Commodore James Barron, at Bladenburg, March 22, 1820.

**MUSICAL DICK.**—Antonius Stradivarius stands confessed as the greatest of all the violin makers. His workmanship, we are told, was absolute perfection, and his varnish soft, rich, brilliant, and generally a dark auburn colour, but sometimes red or reddish brown. The wood that he used was selected with the utmost care, both for vibratory power and beauty of grain.

**W. N.**—Do not allow the young gentleman to monopolize all your attention, and if he really does return your affection, he will be likely to overcome his bashfulness sufficiently to make an explanation of the state of his feelings when he finds that others desire your society as well as himself. If, on the other hand, he cares less for you than you think, you will bear your disappointment much better when you have some one else on whom to fall back.

**S. J. R.**—The following is an easy way to make tracing paper: Lay on a quire of large sized paper, and apply with a fine brush (a painter's sash tool serving the purpose well) a coat of varnish, composed of equal parts Canada balsam and oil of turpentine to the upper side of the first sheet; then hang it on a line, and repeat the operation on the other sheets. If not sufficiently transparent, a second coat of the varnish should be applied as soon as the first has become dry.

**ERNESTINE.**—If there was any engagement at all with the first young man, whom you loved to distraction, he has himself broken it off. You need not, therefore, feel any scruples on that point, if you are at all inclined to try and love the other gentleman. From the tenor of your letter one is inclined to think you are a fickle young lady, and that if you really love to distraction, as claimed, it does not take you long to get over it. Perhaps gentleman No. 1 recognized this fact when he ceased to visit you.

**D. P.**—Brussels carpets are made of linen and worsted, but only the worsted shows on the upper side. The under part looks like a coarse linen cloth. The worsted yarns are woven like velvet over wires which are laid across the warp from one side to the other. These wires are afterwards drawn out, leaving the worsted yarns standing in a row of loops across the carpet. The surface of all Brussels carpets is made up of these rows of little loops, of which there are sometimes more than three hundred in a yard.

**CAROLINE.**—1. The following is a simple way of making charlotte russe: Split and trim one pound of lady's fingers and fit neatly in the bottom and sides of two quart moulds. Whip one quart of rich, sweet cream (previously sweetened with three-fourths of a cup of sugar and flavoured with two teaspoonfuls of vanilla or other extract) to a stiff froth. Then fill the moulds, lay the cakes close together on the top, and set in a cool place until needed. 2. There is no help for it. In the language of Longfellow you must "Suffer and be strong."

**C. L.**—The Isthmus of Panama, called formerly the Isthmus of Darien, was at one time divided into the provinces of Azuero, Chiquirí, Panama, and Veraguas, but in 1865 the several provinces were formed into the State of Panama, of which each now constitutes a department. Hence the change of name. The colony of Darien was founded on the isthmus, near the close of the seventeenth century, by William Paterson, a Scotchman, and the founder of the Bank of England. The place selected was Acta, now Port Escondido, about thirty miles north-west of the Gulf of Darien. The settlement was subsequently abandoned.

"IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND."

Though 'tis better to take the right path at once  
At the outset, my hopeless friend,  
When the heart is stout and the conscience clear.  
Yet, "tis never too late to mend."

The sun shines alike on the good and bad,  
And the rain and the falling dew  
Still waters the weeds, as it does the flowers,  
All the long, bright summer through.

Now, if you're resolved to desert the wrong,  
And the right and the true defend,  
Then buckle the armour strong and tight,  
For, "tis never too late to mend."

The tenderest hope of your eager heart,  
Whatever that hope may be,  
If it have not right for its corner-stone,  
Is a hope forlorn to thee.

Oh! shrink not from the good resolve,  
Oh! look not back, my friend,  
With a failing heart and trembling hand,  
For, "tis never too late to mend."

M. A. K.

**W. R. D.**—1. Wilton or moquette carpets are made like Brussels, but they are woven over a wire with a groove on the top instead of a round one. The wire is not drawn out, as in the Brussels, but is cut out by drawing a sharp knife along the groove. This separates all the loops, and they stand up and make what is called a pile, like the threads in velvet. The pile is afterwards sheared so as to make a smooth, level nap. 2. Tapestry and velvet pile carpets are imitations of Brussels and Wilton, but are cheaper, and do not wear so long.

**J. R.**—1. Unmarried ladies may prefix miles to their names if they see fit; married ladies should always prefix Mrs. 2. The visiting card of a married lady usually gives her husband's name, with the title Mrs. attached, as "Mrs. Henry Bell," instead of "Mrs. Laura H. Gibson," although custom is beginning to sanction the latter when the lady has sufficient personal importance to be known separately from her husband. A lady in that case frequently gives her maiden name in full, as "Mrs. Laura Henderson Gibson."

**DICK B.**—The first thing for you to do would be to have a frank and affectionate talk with the young lady on the subject. It may be that the young man—her brother's intimate friend—is wholly innocent of the charges made against him on mere rumour. It would be worth your while to ascertain, if possible, what the actual facts of the case are before condemning your betrothed for treating her brother's friend cordially, simply because you had heard ill-natured things said of him, and wanted her to mortify him by behaving coolly towards him. If you really love her, and if she also loves you, it would be foolish for you to break the engagement as the case now stands.

**STUDIOUS YOUTH.**—You must bide your time, watch your opportunities, and take any situation as teacher that may come in your way. Sometimes a teacher is wanted for a few weeks to take the place of some one who is ill or unavoidably absent. If such a chance occurs for you, seize upon it, and do your very best. Or if any temporary or poorly remunerated situation is offered, take it, and show what you can do. In the meantime, while waiting for an opportunity, do not spend your leisure in moping or repining, but study hard to accomplish yourself more and more in all the arts of teaching.

**C. M.**—1. A good book would be an appropriate present. 2. On the plate, of course. 3. Ask for a glass of water if you are not a tea drinker.

**F. M.**—May 8, 1862, came on a Thursday. 2. Consult a physician immediately concerning the trouble of which you write. 3. It is very doubtful if your eyesight can be strengthened by any artificial appliances, although the use of glasses of a suitable power may remedy the evil to a slight degree.

**R. S.**—The verses which you enclose show that you have an ear for rhythm, and some sense for the poetic sides of nature, but you must remember that poetry is an art, and that only great geniuses, who have thoroughly mastered the art, may venture upon unrhymed stanzas like yours.

**W. F. R.**—1. The ordinary method of saponification, as the conversion of fats into soaps is called, is by boiling them with solutions of caustic potash or soda. Rosin, which is capable of forming a soap with either potash or soda, is frequently added to soaps. 2. Your handwriting is fair for a lad.

**O. L.**—Toads are very fond of insects, and for this reason they make excellent traps for the entomologist who may thus procure rare and otherwise unobtainable beetles and nocturnal species, which they can be made to disgorge without difficulty. Gardeners often put them into hot-houses to destroy ants and other insects and larvae.

**R. N.**—Woolen and cotton goods are now dyed with aniline colours. All that is necessary is to enclose the aniline of the shade desired in a small muslin bag, and having a tin or brass kettle filled with moderately hot water, dip the colour in and rub the substance out. Then immerse the articles to be dyed, and in a short time they are done. Care must be observed in this process, as the dye is absorbed so readily that spotting will occur in many instances. No fixing mixture is required, although the colour is improved by wringing the goods out of strong soapuds before putting them in the dye.

**K. J. M.**—If you think your future happiness depends on marrying the lady, even though she is several years your senior, do so. The excess in her age need not necessarily prove an obstacle, unless the parties most interested choose to make it such, as you are both at the age of discretion and maturity. It is an exception to the rule, which nature generally dictates, that the gentleman shall be the senior partner of the matrimonial firm, in order that he may be better fitted to cope with the responsibilities of married life, by being his wife's counsellor and support, and that the couple may grow old together.

**G. M. S.**—To make paper-hangers' paste beat up four pounds of good white wheat-flour (well-sifted previously) in sufficient cold water to form a stiff batter. Beat it well in order to take out all lumps, and then add enough cold water to make the mixture of the consistency of pudding batter. To this add about two ounces of well-pounded alum. Pour gently and quickly over the batter boiling water, stirring rapidly at the same time, and when it is seen to lose the white colour of the flour it is cooked and ready. Do not use it, however, while hot, but allow it to cool. Four about a pint of cold water over the top to prevent a skin from forming. Before using, the paste should be thinned by the addition of cold water.

**D. AND E.**—1. That well-known article of food called gingerbread has been known since the fourteenth century, when it was made and sold in Paris. It was then composed of rye dough, kneaded with ginger and other spices, and honey or sugar. It is said to have been introduced into England during the reign of Henry IV. 2. There is no known method of removing birthmarks, except by surgical operation, not always successful. 3. To preserve the teeth they should be cleaned night and morning with a moderately small and soft tooth-brush and a little pure Castile soap and water. If they show signs of decay, consult a dentist at once. 4. Brushing the scalp bristly night and morning with a stiff hair-brush has a tendency to improve the growth of the hair, making it soft and silky, and cleaning the scalp.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-half-pence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—The Double Part 256 and 257, Now Ready, price One Shilling; post free, One Shilling and Fourpence. Also Vol. XLII., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF "THE LONDON READER," 234, Strand, W.C.

††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by J. R. SPENCE; and Printed by WOODFALL and KNOX, Milford Lane, Strand.